MOWA
Ministry of Women's Affairs

UNIFEM
United Nations Development Fund For Women

WFP
World Food Programme

MRRD
Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development

2003 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA)

Report on gender themes in the 2003 NRVA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early interpretations of gender equality lead to the belief that men and women should be provided with equal social, economic and cultural ***opportunities*** in life. Yet experience has shown that satisfying the different social, economic, political and cultural needs of men and women ***to the same degree*** is what truly indicates a state of *gender equality* in society, even if the means by which they are satisfied are completely different. Conducting a gender analysis of data that describes the life conditions of men and women aims to identify what their respective needs might be, what obstacles they might be experiencing, and fundamentally, what dynamics govern the relations between the two. Ultimately, a gender analysis reveals where interventions and assistance could help both better meet and satisfy their needs.

This report was commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) to produce a gender analysis of the NRVA data. However, the NRVA was never intended to be a survey of gender issues in Afghanistan, and therefore, not all the data required for a solid gender analysis are available. Hence the decision to use the data to help identify areas for further investigation into gender roles and relations in rural Afghanistan and to prompt suggestions for programme interventions specifically designed to assist rural women at the household and community levels. This paper is *not* a policy paper – policy-level recommendations in all the sectors addressed can be found in the specific works cited throughout the text, as researched and prepared by various sector-specific experts and agencies in recent years.

In general, the NRVA data reveal a need for quality community-level educational and vocational interventions in all sectors, coupled with increased access to microfinance and credit opportunities. Men and women alike need to acquire contextually appropriate skills and knowledge that allow them to establish low-cost income-generating activities that respond to local community needs and satisfy their own basic survival requirements. At the same time, the interventions suggested aim to address either directly or indirectly, some of the more severe gaps in services revealed by the NRVA data. Where policy and state provision of facilities, services and safety nets are slow in the coming, communities and vulnerable households must be empowered to encourage the development process from the bottom-up.

It is hoped that some of the suggestions contained in this report, if ever implemented, might help them begin that process.

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INTRODUCTION

Article Twenty-Two

Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man or woman, have equal rights and duties before the law.

The Constitution of Afghanistan

Chapter Two: Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

The importance of establishing gender equality has been formally recognised and reflected in the new Afghan Constitution. Still, reaching a state of gender equality in real life across the country remains an enormous challenge.

This report aims to (a) outline the fundamental concepts behind gender equality and gender analysis, (b) present national NRVA data for Afghanistan and (c) suggest possible community-level interventions aimed at addressing some of the many areas where women need assistance to improve their current levels of participation, empowerment and personal growth in the social, economic, political and cultural arenas. This paper is not a policy paper and it makes no attempt to suggest policy-level interventions as the thematic areas covered are many, and much work has already been done on engendering policy-level positions. Where development is weak is on-the-ground – it is in this area that the paper wishes to provide new insight and innovative suggestions.

Gender equality and gender analysis

***Gender Equality** means that women and men have equal conditions for realising their full human rights and potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results*[1].

Early interpretations of gender equality lead to the belief that men and women should be provided with equal *opportunities*. However, time has shown that having equal opportunities not always guaranteed obtaining equal *results*. Furthermore, the realisation gradually dawned that not all results were equally desirable by all men and women and that more gender-specificity was required in the design of policies and programmes to ensure both sets of needs were correctly met.

What truly needs to be attained, is a state in which both men and women are able to attain **results** that satisfy their different social, economic, political and cultural needs equally [2]. As the conditions that govern the lives of men and women are very different, what men and women need to reach a given, equal condition may also be very different. This is where the importance of accurate gender analysis comes in, as it is a tool that helps understand the differences between men and women and therefore helps identify their true needs in order to attain equal life conditions in society.

The issue of poor market access provides a good example of this concept:
Women are often more affected than men by poor market access – due to domestic workload, poor roads and transportation, etc. While the intuitive reaction would be to address such obstacles and to assist women in physically reaching markets more, it should be remembered that one of the objectives of reaching food markets is that of being able to access and purchase food products. Finding alternative ways for food products to reach women instead of obliging women to reach the food products would effectively ensure the same final result –i.e., procurement of food, but possibly at lower physical cost to women.

Men's and women's realities may be different as a result of both sex (biological differences) and gender (social differences). These differences forge the social dynamics and relationships between the two, and govern how each participates in the social, political, economic and cultural scenarios of community life.

Women's empowerment can be understood as a process whereby women, individually and collectively, become aware of how power structures, processes and relationships operate in their lives and gain the self confidence and strength to challenge the resulting gender inequalities. The concept of empowerment arose from an understanding that increasing women's participation in development processes, without fundamental changes to these processes themselves, would bring about little change. Linked to this was the recognition that provision of resources and services could not tackle the root causes of gender inequality. Women need to be able to assert their own agency to break out of gender discrimination. Empowerment involves awareness raising, building of self-confidence, expansion of choices, involvement in decision- making and increased access to and control over resources.[3]

A gender analysis explores the nature of these differences – and attempts to uncover the underlying power relationship between the two – by systematically asking questions about men and women, with respect to their roles and activities, access to resources and constraints, and benefits and incentives. In general, some relevant questions the researcher needs to answer can include[4]:

Roles and Activities

- Who does what: productive activities? household reproductive activities (child care, cooking, water and fuel collection)? recreation?
- Who does the work: women? men? girls? boys? is it done by both women and men? by only one of them?
- How long does it take? is the work seasonal? monthly? weekly? daily?
- Where is the work carried out: home? farm? city? factory?
- How rigid is the gender division of labour?

Resources and constraints

- What resources do men and women have to work with?

- Who uses/owns/controls each of these resources? who is excluded from use/ownership/control?
- What decisions do men and women make: in the household? in the community? are constraints to participation in social and economic life different for men and women?

Benefits and incentives

- Who controls productive activity? reproductive activity?
- Who benefits from economic activity? who receives income? who controls income? what about non-income benefits?
- Do men and women have different incentives for participation in these activities?

Clearly, to be able to answer the above, data must first be collected for analysis, and the key to conducting a valid gender analysis lies in collecting appropriate and valid disaggregated data so that differences and gaps in the respective realities can be identified and studied. However, a good gender analysis relies not only on the availability of sex-disaggregated data but also on data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, occupation, language, parental status, age, disability, etc., and/or any other criteria deemed possible and pertinent to the population under study. At the same time, it is **fundamental** that the importance of respecting standard survey design methodologies be recognised so as to ensure that relevant gender indicators and their metrics (how they are to be measured) are clearly identified and that all of the relevant information is actually collected by the survey tools, which need to be designed accordingly.

"The way in which information is collected and analyzed is critical to the development and application of a gender perspective. Appropriate procedures in this regard will assist the users of information to recognize patterns in violations of the human rights of women and to recognize the gender dimensions of all human rights violations. The value of gender-disaggregated data cannot be over-estimated, and steps should be taken to ensure that data collection and reporting processes in the field of human rights routinely conform to this standard."

New Zealand Gender Analysis Guidelines, Essential Elements in the Development of a Gender-Sensitive Approach in the United Nations Human Rights Activities.

About the NRVA

Survey scope and tools

The 2003 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) was carried out between July and October 2003 across Afghanistan, with data being collected between two to four weeks after the main summer harvests in each village visited during the survey.

The **primary objective** of the study was to collect information at community and household level to help better understand the livelihoods of rural settled populations and nomadic pastoralists (Kuchi) across the country. The results were intended to assist the many stakeholders in designing and developing strategies to address the short, medium, and long-term needs of these populations through appropriate and timely **policy development** and **intervention strategies.**[5]

The NRVA was designed following a multiple-stakeholder methodology[6]. Hence, it is very comprehensive and collects data relevant to various thematic sectors –i.e., education, health, agricultural livelihood practices, labour and income-generation, dietary diversity, market and service access, etc.

To meet the needs and expectations of the various stakeholders and the intrinsic complexity of the various thematic sectors, different survey tools were designed to collect data at distinct levels.

The **district questionnaire** collected information from key district-level informants who included, where possible, district authorities, Kuchi leaders, and veterinary field units. This questionnaire collected basic information on availability and access to markets, health facilities, water, and education as well as the general physical environment and overall security. Population estimates were also collected to facilitate planning and targeting of potential interventions.

The **shura questionnaire** collected data through focus group discussions and collected information on community access to markets and health facilities, estimates of education levels and literacy, and priorities for community members. The shuras were also asked to stratify the community population into wealth groups: very poor, poor, medium, and better off families. Where possible, both men's and women's focus groups were interviewed. By design, the women's questions focus more on women's roles in the community and households, education, constraints to livelihoods, female-headed households and women's decision-making roles. Where it was not possible to conduct women's shura focus groups, the men's focus group was asked to answer on behalf of the women on specific sections.

The **wealth group questionnaire** collected data through focus group discussions with community members in the very poor, poor, and medium wealth groups only. Men and women's wealth groups were interviewed separately wherever it was possible to take women enumerators. The focus group interviews collected information on: typical agricultural activities, livestock, labour and income (activities and amounts), and access to markets, health and education. In addition, focus groups also provided their inputs on priority interventions to improve the quality of life for members of their communities.

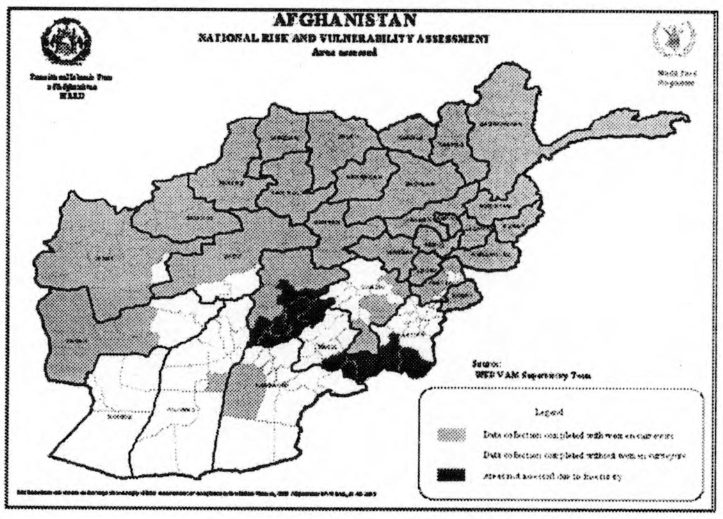
For the **household questionnaire,** approximately 6-7 household interviews were conducted in each community. The questionnaires included modules on household

demography, education, health, migration, income activities, household asset ownership and amenities, risk exposure and response, agricultural activities, livestock ownership, and food consumption.

Coverage

All provinces were covered, though not all districts were, due to security constraints. A complete list of provinces and districts surveyed is available in Annex I.

It is also important to note that female interviewers were not able to go to all districts (see map below). In certain areas, it was not appropriate for women enumerators to travel and/or dialogue with community members and gathering community women into focus groups was not possible. As a consequence, data from women's shura and women's wealth groups were only collected in those provinces where women enumerators were able to go. The only section for which men were asked to provide information on behalf of women, when women themselves could not answer, was the section on labour opportunities.



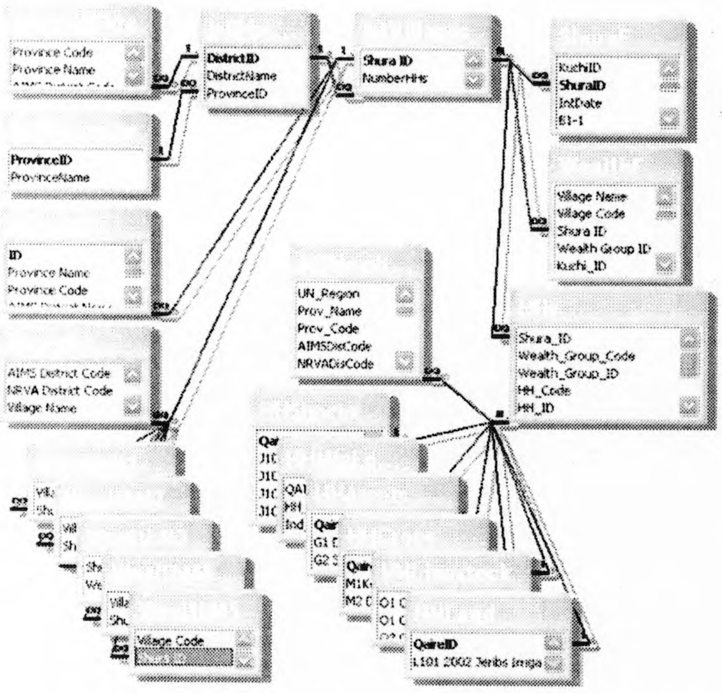
Data

Upon completion of the NRVA initiative, the above survey questionnaires generated a massive amount of data, much of which was captured in a tailor-made Microsoft Access database or Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. The data were subsequently elaborated and run through various packages such that the author was presented with the following separate files at the beginning of this exercise:

- NRVA 2003 Agro-ecological Zone District data.xls
- NRVA 2003 District price data.xls
- NRVA 2003 Female wealthgroup.xls
- NRVA 2003 Household Data.xls
- NRVA Male Women's shura.xls
- NRVA Male Wealthgroup.xls
- NRVA Kuchi District data.xls
- NRVA Household data.mdb (Microsoft Access database file)

As the intent of the multi-level survey design was, *inter alia*, to ensure data triangulation and the depiction of truly verified descriptions of reality, the author chose to recompile the data into a single relational dataset, thus reintroducing and enforcing the hierarchical relations between the various socio-political layers described. This was done to allow any given scenario to be assessed using data from all questionnaires as appropriate. In other words, any given topic e.g., *education*, could be assessed taking the district-level data into consideration, alongside the data gathered from men's and women's shura belonging to that district, as well as data from men's and women's wealth groups belonging to the same shura and district, and finally the household-level data belonging to the same village/shura /district.

Recompiling the data was a lengthy process that required significant data cleaning and normalisation. A single database was reconstituted to contain all data relevant to this exercise. The database model is the following:



By recreating a solid database model, the hierarchical relations between the smallest survey unit (the household) and the highest survey unit (the district) were enforceable and traceable at all times, and specific criteria (e.g., agro-ecological zone could be applied to data across the board even if the agro-ecological zone was not explicitly collected at all levels).

This database, which is the tool that was used for all of the subsequent data elaboration currently contains the following data sets (where each record may be seen as a single completed field questionnaire):

- District-level records 614
- Men's shura records 1,853
- Women's shura records 1,525
- Women's wealth group records 4,335
- Men's wealth group records 5,559
- Household records 11,072

- Women-headed households 1,377
- Men-headed households 9,695

About this report

This report was commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) to produce a gender analysis of the NRVA data. It is one of three outputs required of a joint-project sponsored by the WFP, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Afghan Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and the Afghan Ministry for Women's Affairs (MOWA). The relevant section of the consultant's Terms of Reference for this report is presented below (complete TOR are presented in Annex II):

5.1.2 Gender analysis of NRVA survey results and possible overlap in gender indicators with other recent survey activities.

a) Obtain other survey data the complimentary NRVA data set for a gender perspective analysis (if any) and familiarize the conceptual background of these other surveys to see how they may be complimentary and supportive of the gender analysis of the NRVA.
b) Propose a range of topics/thematic areas (e.g. social, economic) for analysis to be presented, discusses, and agreed upon with the NRVA gender peer review group.
c) Construct the indicators required for each thematic area, and provide some interpretation of results.
d) Following the guidelines of the NRVA theme reports, present the final analysis of the topics previously agreed upon among the review group in a NRVA Gender Report.
e) Present summary of overlapping gender analysis from other thematic group.
f) Identify methodological strengths and weaknesses of the NRVA 2003 with regards to the collection of sex disaggregated data and the development/inclusion of gender indicators, and recommendations for changes to the indicators collected, and the shelf-life particular indicators relating to a gender disaggregated understanding of rural livelihoods. Include recommendations on the frequency of observation for different gender related indicators needed to maintain an informative gender analysis.
g) Summarize implications for programming, targeting and policy.
h) Make presentation of results and findings at NRVA analysis workshop, and other Ministry specific presentations.

Considerations

In view of the above on data requirements for a solid gender analysis, it must be said that the NRVA was never meant to be a survey of gender issues, and though many efforts were made during the design phase to include indicators of relevance to an eventual gender analysis, all indicators and information required were not necessarily included in the final survey tools. As a consequence complete metrics and data for a solid gender analysis are not available in the resulting data, which while strong from many perspectives of social interest (e.g., dietary diversity, vulnerability, coping strategies, etc.) is less strong from the gender perspective. In response to requirement 5.1.2(f) of the Terms of Reference detailed above, a detailed elaboration of this position vis-à-vis the survey tools and recommendations for increasing their gender-sensitivity is presented in the author's report *NRVA Survey Design and Tools, Recommendations for enhanced gender-specificity and streamlined design.*

Still, given the massive amount of data that was generated by the NRVA, every effort has been made to extract what can be used (a) as a starting point to help identify areas for further research and investigation for better insight into the gender issues existing in the various thematic areas covered (in response to points 5.1.2(b & c) above) and (b) to provide suggestions and recommendations for community-level interventions to foster women's economic, social and personal development (5.1.2(c, e, g)). This report does not provide policy-level recommendations primarily because the thematic areas covered are many, and all have been extensively covered by the specialised agencies and organisations who have authored much of the documentation consulted and referred to throughout this report. The suggestions contained herein are instead intended to stimulate the imagination of programme designers and implementers of activities on-the-ground, at community level, to highlight some of the linkages between sectors of activities and to break some of the traditional moulds currently applied to women's development activities. Furthermore, it should be noted that a variety of activities proposed also explicitly include men and boys, as should all activities aiming to change the condition of women which is largely determined by the perceptions of men. Working with only one side of the equation will consistently yield the wrong result – while men and boys must always be involved, the scope is that of developing recognition, acceptance and endorsement of the new roles that are being suggested for women.

Other issues that need to be raised with respect to the use and interpretation of the data provided by the NRVA include the following:

- In terms of extrapolation of results, the survey design and sampling methodology adopted for the NRVA do not allow for any inferential analysis to be conducted on the resulting data –i.e., the data collected are not statistically representative of any larger population and therefore no observations made based on the data can be extrapolated to the population at large. All observations must be interpreted as relating exclusively to the population surveyed;

- A design flaw in the original database model that was used to capture household level data has rendered the data relative to individual household members potentially unreliable[7]. For this reason, all references throughout the report are made to the household and not the household members individually;

- Cases of non-response were not handled in the data coding and data entry phase –i.e., the lack of data in certain instances cannot be explained. This is relevant in places where the available coding options for responses was not used. Where neither 1 nor 2 are present in the data (for example for yes/no responses) it is not possible to determine whether the respondent did not answer and/or if that not answering is to be considered a "no", or

whether there is some other factor that should be taken into consideration. There are many tables throughout the report where response percentages do not add up to 100% - this is precisely because of the non-responses of present respondents –i.e., respondents for whom a record does exist. Artificially reducing the number of total respondents because of their non-response would skew the resulting percentages;

- Finally, there are numerous instances where data were not collected coherently in the field. Stopping rules and verification in the field were not respected in many cases, thus generating intuitively false statements in the data –i.e., in the section on accessibility of health services to men and women, traditional birth attendants have been marked as available to men only, and/or responses on facilities were provided when the answer to the previous questions indicated that said facilities were not even available to the community (as per the same respondents). Hence certain sections of data have not been considered as they were deemed to be somewhat less reliable than others (the section on men and women's access to health services being one of those eliminated).

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In view of the above on (a) the reconstituted complete data set and (b) the cross-cutting nature of gender, the entire set of NRVA data has been assessed to extract any and all data that might provide insight into the realities of men and women across the various areas explored by the survey. While some of the selected data may not intuitively appear "gender" relevant, it should be noted that some data help define the environment in which men and women are living and therefore some of the challenges – and opportunities – that could be addressed through community-level interventions.

To facilitate and organise the presentation of such a wide range of data, a reporting format was devised to provide a framework for this exercise. The data being considered throughout the report are divided into the following thematic sections (which naturally emerge from the survey tools themselves):

1. Population and community
2. Natural resources and mines
3. Agricultural practices
4. Land tenure
5. Livestock
6. Markets
7. Labour and income generation
8. Migration and employment patterns
9. Household budget, debts and remittances
10. Education
11. Health
12. Coping strategies
13. Development priorities.

The report is divided into three main sections:

Part One: Analysis of gender themes in NRVA data.
This section presents the data extracted against each of the above themes aggregated at national level. As appropriate, suggestions for additional research to fine-tune gender analysis possibilities and community-level interventions are made, building on the themes emerging from the current NRVA results.

Part Two: NRVA data by agro-ecological zone.
This section takes the data presented in Part I and disaggregates it by agro-ecological zone, with a view to seeing if and how the agro-ecological zone might affect other aspects of people's lives beyond the intuitively evident arena of their agricultural practices.

Part Three: Annexes
The Annexes contain the main annexes referred to in the text of Part One, but also individual province data sets for consultation by interested readers as required. No detailed analysis is provided at the provincial level primarily because of data scarcity. Still, the data can be used to assess whether the suggestions for interventions provided in Part One are or are not particularly appropriate for a given province.

In view of the above points regarding the technical limitations of the data, all data presented throughout the report are presented in a purely descriptive manner, one variable at a time, as tallied from the cleaner and more coherent data sets. No statistical tests have been run and no correlations between variables have been established. Still, the picture that emerges from the composite data set is fascinating and comprehensive as gender is as of yet unexplored territory in Afghanistan.

ANALYSIS OF GENDER THEMES IN NRVA DATA

AFGHANISTAN

Provinces and population distribution

AIMS District name	CSO 1970 Estimate	NRVA Respondents' estimate	Of which: IDPs	Kuchi
Badakhshan	709,000	777,619	22,820	0
Badghis	297,300	673,175	29,152	21,620
Baghlan	662,180	869,781	48,170	12,500
Balkh	698,600	1,501,000	53,275	0
Bamyan	333,100	477,500	24,490	0
Farah	314,200	436,000	6,700	2,500
Faryab	767,300	2,193,000	56,170	2,000
Ghazni	897,100	1,330,550	46,510	70,290
Ghor	487,700	733,648	14,260	9,300
Hilmand	713,787	1,198,900	39,170	7,520
Hirat	910,700	2,159,115	6,850	20,640
Jawzjan	399,660	740,781	45,160	10,700
Kabul	1,186,550	1,186,900	235,738	15,060
Kandahar	566,150	577,000	67,000	4,515
Kapisa	363,000	843,300	28,100	4,400
Khost	301,205	1,197,000	30,800	0
Kunar	317,300	660,000	10,003	0
Kunduz	652,600	892,400	70,600	0
Laghman	416,300	486,923	37,143	0
Logar	296,050	387,875	35,800	7,800
Nangarhar	1,004,100	2,075,878	324,756	5,350
Nimroz	141,400	325,000	9,450	1,593
Nuristan	94,500	321,500	9,978	0
Paktika	311,000	965,000	45,850	20,850
Paktya	398,320	1,265,010	37,410	80,200
Parwan	700,000	1,186,450	24,480	0
Samangan	300,500	505,300	15,270	0
Sari Pul	451,640	699,000	21,630	0
Takhar	673,670	1,043,497	34,460	0
Uruzgan	372,800	454,000	31,450	0
Wardak	415,800	671,600	23,780	5,800
Zabul	**127,900**	**216,000**	**7,900**	**0**
Totals	**16,281,412**	**29,050,702**	**1,494,325**	**302,638**

Population and community

Article Fifty-Three

To regulate medical services as well as financial aid to survivors of martyrs and missing persons, and for the reintegration of the disabled and handicapped and their active participation in the society, the state shall adopt necessary measures in accordance with the provisions of the law. The state shall guarantee the rights of retirees, and shall render necessary aid to the elderly, women without caretakers, disabled and handicapped as well as poor orphans in accordance with the provisions of the law.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter Two: Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

At the time of survey, population figures were reported by 68% of the district-level respondents as having **increased slightly** and by 17% as having **increased greatly** compared to the previous year.

Population changes since the previous year

Total N	Significantly decreased	Slightly decreased	Same	Slightly increased	Greatly increased
606	1%	1%	14%	68%	17%

Source: *District data*

The communities represented by the women's shura interviewed included **142,405** households in total, of which **48%** fell into the better/off medium wealth groups, **38%** into the poor and **14%** into the very poor wealth group. **11,363** (8% of the total number of households) were women-headed households.

Community household composition

.	Totals	%	BO%	M%	P%	VP%
Households	142,405	100%	12%	36%	38%	14%
WHH	11,363	8%	0%	1%	3%	4%

Source: *Women's shura data*

The communities represented by the men's shura interviewed included **175,892** households in total, of which **51%** fell into the **better off/medium** wealth group, while approximately **34%** fell into the **poor** and **14%** into the **very poor** wealth groups. Of the total number of households, **8%** did not have an able-bodied worker, and 7% (11,489) of the households in the communities were women-headed households. **5%** of the total number of households were **Kuchi** households.

Community household composition

	Totals	%	BO%	M%	P%	VP%
Households	**175,892**	**100%**	**13%**	**38%**	**34%**	**14%**
Returnee	16,526	9%	1%	3%	4%	2%
Left community	3,628	2%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Kuchi	8,440	5%	1%	2%	2%	1%
Have no able-bodied worker	13,467	8%	0%	1%	3%	4%
Women-headed	11,489	7%	0%	1%	2%	3%

Source: *Men's shura data*

Possible areas for intervention

The NRVA collected data from both men's and women's shura on the number of households in the communities they represented. Households were separated and counted according to a few key criteria –i.e., whether they were returnees, Kuchi, did not have an able-bodied worker[8], or were women-headed households[9] etc. However, detailed information on the nature and composition of these various households from a gender perspective was not collected at this level, and the fact that the indicated household characteristics are not mutually exclusive was not addressed. Some of the questions that might naturally follow could include, among others: How many of the Kuchi households are women-headed households, how many of those returning to the community are women-headed households, how many of those returning to the community have no able-bodied worker and are women-headed households? How many of those households have disabled household members? How many have disabled women household members? Answers to some, but not all, of these questions may be extracted from the household-level surveys e.g., on disability, for example.

In addition to recognising the need for detailed information on the complex attributes that can characterise households in Afghanistan, women-headed households themselves can be defined in a multitude of ways and this area also needs more attention. What defines a woman-headed household in reality? According to the community? These households are often victimised by the development community solely by virtue of their being women-headed households. Yet, so little is known about the true dynamics of women-headed households and their conditions. More information needs to be gathered so as to best understand how to assist them in improving their life conditions and opportunities, to ensure they achieve the same results men-headed households are able to achieve in society[10]. Some of the questions that need to be asked might include:

- What is the marital status of the woman head-of-household? This is important as it will inherently define her social role and authority – is she single, married but whose husband has migrated out for work, married to a disabled man, divorced, repudiated, or is she a widow?
- How many dependents does the woman head-of-household have? How many are boys and how many are girls? How many are elderly? If she is/was married, is/was she the only wife? Are the children in her household her children?

Furthermore, questions need to be asked of society to better understand which households actually qualify as "women-headed households", given the diversity implied by the questions listed above and the fact that different communities may put women into different categories according to their personal situation. As gender roles are defined by society – and they can change over time and space – a contextualised definition needs to be provided so households in a given community can be placed and categorised appropriately. Such clarity of definition will also be required for the formulation of appropriate policies and programmes so that "*women without caretakers*" are effectively identified and assisted by the state.

Natural Resources and Mines

Article Fifteen

To protect and improve forests as well as the living environment, the state has a duty to adopt necessary measures.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter One: State

In terms of natural resources, while the majority of the district-level respondents stated that there were **no natural resources** available to the populations living in the areas under survey, almost 20% stated that people had access to **forests**:

Availability of natural resources by district-level respondents

None	Forests	Mines	Other
78%	19%	1%	2%

Source: District data

This was largely confirmed by the men's shura interviewed. When asked what two natural resources were available to their communities to generate income, though the majority also mentioned there were none, 15% confirmed forests resources could be tapped by some of the populations living in the areas under survey, while another 4% stated households could collect wild plants and bushes:

Availability of natural resources by men's shura

None	Forests	Mines	Wild plants / bushes	Wild birds	Wild animals	Fish	Other
78%	15%	0%	4%	0%	0%	1%	1%

Source: Men's shura data

Possible areas for intervention

To be able to identify and implement effective and sustainable measures for the utilisation and protection of the environment - which implies gender-sensitive measures – additional questions on community natural resource utilisation need to be asked so as to enable a valid gender analysis of the resulting data.

Questions of relevance include: who collects the forest products, wild plants and bushes (some data on this is available through the NRVA in the section on labour distribution between men and women – see relevant section on page 25). However, once collection is done, it is also important to know who controls the process of elaborating raw materials into the final products used – i.e., do men collect and distribute to women, do women collect and hand over to men, do men collect and work the materials, or do women collect and work the materials? Are children involved? (also see section on most important agricultural practices on page 17 where information on communities utilising forest products as a source of income are identified). In all areas, it is the underlying dynamics of power and control that need to be understood so as to enable the design of appropriate intervention plans and activities.

The NRVA data clearly indicate that forests and wild plants and bushes can be a valuable resource for Afghans living in certain areas around the country. However, while cedars, pines and oaks covered more than 3% of the country before the Soviet invasion, forests now comprise less than 0.5% of the land. Poverty is forcing Afghans to use firewood for cooking (See section on Health, pg. 30) and fuel, and farmers are selling off their wood to meet their household basic needs. If deforestation continues uncontrolled, the nation's natural woods may completely vanish by 2005[11]. Furthermore, the uncontrolled collection (and lack of replacement) of wild plants and bushes also contributes to the process of desertification that is also advancing at an alarming pace.

The almost universal and traditional role of caretakers provides women with great opportunities to be home and community educators, advocators and implementers of sustainable development. However, this role is today largely neglected and/or underdeveloped (and not yet recognized by community men and women alike). It is here that the development community can assist most by introducing targeted activities. While men, women and children are involved in all of the practices related to the use of forest products (see page 25) and other natural resources – be they used for fuel, income-generation or food – a recent assessment of the condition of forests in Afghanistan, conducted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), has revealed a dire need for change in current practices around the country[12]. Women can and must contribute in a concrete way to disseminating and implementing eco-friendly natural resource management practices –i.e., by developing and distributing alternative fuel wood sources, by implementing natural resource protection and replenishment practices, and by exploring new techniques to optimise available natural resources.

In view of the above, areas for on-the-ground activities could include, *inter alia*:

Forest resource management

Men and women should be targeted with a comprehensive training in forest resource management and protection, with a view to (a) providing both with the basic knowledge required to improve community forest resource management and (b) to forge a leading role for women in the community – recognised, accepted and endorsed by men – to enforce the use of correct forest resource management practices. Such a training could include, among other things, components on:

- **Sustainable branch harvesting**. The removal of individual branches from living trees, as opposed to the felling of the entire tree, is a somewhat more sustainable practice, particularly when the collection of wood for fuel is inevitable (as is the case in Afghanistan). Firewood collectors need to be informed of the differences in branch and tree harvesting.

- **Short-rotation forestry**[13]. The practice of *coppicing* consists of growing nursling trees very densely so that juvenile vigour, a quickly closed canopy, and intense competition, induce great growth spurts in the spring; this is followed by substantial increases in girth later in the year. After 3-5 years the growth is harvested during the winter as close to the ground as possible. This harvesting triggers early maturation of buds in the stump that by early the following spring can rapidly grow into strong sprouts, which can again be harvested after 3-5 years, thus repeating the cycle. Given the consistently manageable size of the sprouts and the small plots required for this practice (a 4 foot by 4 foot plot is feasible) women could easily manage this process, thus contributing to increasing sources of fuel wood while enforcing management of forest resources while also creating a source of household income. Training and assistance in practicing short-rotation forestry should be explored.

- **Production of firewood crops**[14]. Women should be trained by knowledgeable agronomists in identifying, planting, maintaining and recycling shrubs and tree species ideal for energy production. These would be particularly aggressive, rapidly growing species, capable of surviving in arid to semi-arid areas. Women with small plots, and or no plots at all but with access to a home garden or rooftop garden, could grow bushes that would (a) supply them with their own fuel needs as well as (b) provide them with an opportunity to sell the excess to other community members. In this manner, again uncontrolled felling of entire forest trees could be minimised, if not curtailed, in the areas where such practices are adopted.

- **Natural regeneration cycles and methods**. The collection of all fruits, berries and nuts (including those that fall to the ground) because of their potential economic value, has devastating effects on the natural regeneration cycle of plants and trees. This results in the decimation of the tree/bush population and the ultimate conversion of soil to dry land cultivation and/or grazing land. Women (usually the main fruit and berry collectors) need to be trained in this area so that damage is minimised and natural regeneration is encouraged (or at least not impeded).

- **Tree nurseries**[15]. Women should be actively targeted for involvement in establishing tree and plant nurseries – either home-based or community-based – with a view to (a) increasing indigenous grass, shrub and tree seed available to the community, (b) promote change in local attitudes and behaviours in relation to natural resource management and (c) provide households, particularly women-headed households, with employment and income-generating opportunities.

- **Sustainable grazing practices**. Though women-headed households reportedly own very few heads of livestock, women in general are still involved in shepherding activities as much as men (particularly in the Kuchi households). The consequences of over-grazing and the importance of regulating grazing, through rotation for example, need to be conveyed and sustainable practices enforced in local communities.

Reintroduction of local forest wardens

Central government laws introduced in the 1970's against cutting, grazing and cultivating in pistachio tree forests were initially meant to be enforced by local forest wardens, but this mechanism has fallen into disuse during the years of turmoil that followed. In view of further developing women's role as community natural resource (and forest) protectors, select local men and women should be targeted for training in current legislation on the use and protection of natural resources (e.g., above-

suggested training in forest resource management and protection), and in collaboration with – and the endorsement of – the local shura, should be appointed as new community forest wardens. Ideally, husband and wife teams of wardens could be created so that they could circulate together, report to local authorities on issues identified (and offensive behaviours of other community members), as well as be well-equipped to impart information on appropriate practices to men and women separately, or as most appropriate in their community.

Women's parks. In many Afghan cities women need more protected public spaces where they can convene with their female relatives, friends and children, without necessarily being accompanied by men. All provinces and major cities have now established Department of Women's Affairs (DOWA) premises, where the provincial representation of the central Ministry of Women's Affairs is based. These premises are largely recognised and accepted by communities as safe places for women to go. Many of the premises also have a fair amount of land at their disposal. Women should be involved in beautification projects for these areas, planting trees, bushes and flowers and creating a park environment for community women's enjoyment[16].

Training in soil conservation practices
Deforestation and the over gathering of bush vegetation are greatly contributing to desertification. Comprehensive training to men and women, as above, should be provided in best-practices to combat desertification, and local groups of women should be organised to assist in the following activities:

- **Stabilisation of dunes and soils** through the replanting of bushes and low vegetation, as well as the controlled harvesting of wild plants and bushes collected for medicinal and nutritional purposes.

- **Reseeding of degraded rangeland** through specific projects to replant grass and other small vegetation, that include means of irrigating and protecting newly seeded lands to ensure germination.

Bamboo cultivation. Climatic conditions would allow bamboo to be grown in various provinces in Afghanistan. Bamboo is easy to grow, fast growing, requires little maintenance, and can be grown in the ground or in pots. Bamboo has many uses, among which construction, furniture, animal feed and because it can grow in thickets (depending on spacing during planting) it can contribute to combating soil erosion on hillsides and river banks[17]. Women should be targeted for training in various forms of bamboo cultivation and in the many uses of bamboo (see following section on labour, in particular).

Cultivation and processing of flavour and fragrance industry[18]. A market research and feasibility study have been conducted by Altai Consulting, on behalf of UNDP and Hugues Dewavrin to explore the possibility of developing this industry in Afghanistan. The *Damascena* rose has been identified as the most suitable for the production of rose oil, and given the *modus operandi* of rose cultivation, women would be particularly suitable for this activity.

Developing fish ponds for women[19] and training in fish processing and preparation[20].
A small percentage of the men's shura mentioned that some of the population had access to fish. It would be worth while to explore the possibility of targeting women for technical training in the creating, managing and earning income through fish ponds. Fish ponds can be particularly interesting for women for the following reasons:

- Fish ponds can be built close to the home (provided an adequate water supply is present in the area) which makes them accessible to women and young girls who normally have limited mobility – this is also extremely important for the more vulnerable category of disabled women;
- Fish ponds are not particularly dependent on the soil or type of land, such that women, who normally do not have access to the more fertile plots of land, would not be particularly disadvantaged;
- Women can manage and harvest their fish according to a plan that ensures sustainability of the stock –i.e., fish stock can be managed to meet both household food requirements as well as income-generating needs;
- The addition of fish to the household diet improves dietary diversity and individual nutritional status.

In addition, fish ponds can play a vital role in the rehabilitation of over-cropped, nutrient-poor soils, and women can thus play yet another socially recognized role in the natural resource management effort described above. Fish ponds can also be created as a part of other resource management and protection initiatives e.g., fish ponds can be built as part of water supply and irrigation systems; vegetable scraps and animal manures can be collected and used for fertilizing ponds, etc.

As an integral part of the training on establishing fish ponds, women must also be trained in fish processing and preparation techniques to minimise losses during storage and marketing.

Bee-keeping[21,22]. The products of beekeeping –i.e., honey and wax can be sources of income for women and women-headed households, and in Afghanistan, they can easily be marketed locally. Beekeeping also has many environmentally friendly consequences as bees play an important role in the pollination of many flowering plants, thus increasing the yield of certain crops such as beans, melons, sunflowers and various fruits. In addition, bee-keeping does not require much land nor fertile land (bee hive boxes/cages can be prepared in a backyard), so they can be a valuable source of income in less fertile and agriculturally productive areas.

Article Nine

Mines and other subterranean resources as well as historical relics shall be the property of the state. Protection, management and proper utilisation of public lands and properties as well as natural resources shall be regulated by law.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter One: State

Though most of the district-level respondents (66%) stated there were **no mines** in the areas being surveyed, almost 20% stated that there were mines in some places but that they did not affect people's livelihoods, while another 20% stated that the mines present in their areas **did** have an impact on livelihoods:

Presence of mines

No mines in the area	Mines are present but **don't affect** livelihoods	Mines are present and **do affect** livelihoods
66%	18%	16%

Source: District data

The men's shura interviewed around the country further detailed how mines affected the local populations by identifying how they affected people's access to lands and services:

Impact of mines on livelihoods

Agricultural land	Pasture land	Homes	Water sources	Schools, clinics and markets
4%	10%	1%	1%	1%

Source: Men's shura data

Possible areas for intervention

In order to better understand the impact that mines can have on men *and* women, and to develop appropriate strategies and interventions that are sustainable and effective, more information is required in this area.

Some of the areas that need to be explored include, among others:

- How do differences in mobility for men and women affect their exposure to landmines? The men's shura information reveals that access to agricultural and pasture land, water sources, homes, schools, clinics and markets can be affected – but patterns in men's and women's access to these locations also varies, and consequently, one or the other may be more or less affected accordingly. For example, women-headed households for whom access to water sources is limited because of the threat of landmines and their limited mobility may ultimately be *more* affected by the presence of landmines than men-headed households living in the same areas;

- In view of designing appropriate and gender-sensitive programmes on mine-awareness and injury reaction and treatment, the following areas should be explored:
  - o *Who receives and provides immediate assistance*? E.g. do women and men received different first aid care? Is priority given to military personnel (most often male) while civilian casualties often take longer to reach medical services? Who cares for victims of landmines? Are they getting adequate support? As women are often the care-takers of victims of landmines, what are their needs in this area? Inequalities in access to services may affect men and women differently when caring for a landmine victim[23]. Women victims of landmines may have difficulty in gaining access to medical care and physical rehabilitation if not accompanied by a male relative and treated by female health staff[24].
  - o *What are the gender differences regarding the social and economic impact of landmine injuries?* The loss of a limb can affect women and men differently. Being an amputee can affect a woman's potential marriage chances. In many cases, married women with disabilities face immediate divorce and are left with the sole responsibility for children and the risk of poverty. For example, research in Cambodia has shown that while disabled men could rely on their wives to take care of them, disabled women were often abandoned by their partners and/or had difficulty finding someone to help take care of them.[25]

Actions to be taken by Government include... (To) Provide landmine awareness campaigns or classes in close cooperation with communities and community leaders formally and informally, making them accessible to women in afflicted areas, and provide resources and assistance for landmine clearance and share technology and information so that local populations can engage effectively in the safe clearance of landmines.

Commission on the Status of Women: Agreed Conclusions on the Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action (UN Sales No. E.00.IV.6)

The following are some of the many areas where activities targeting women can be designed and implemented at community level[26];

Mine clearance. "*Mine clearance involves surveying to gather mine-related information, the mapping and marking of contaminated ground and the clearance of mines and ERW (explosive remnants of war).*[27]" Mine clearance programmes need to take the following into consideration:

- **Assessing and monitoring the landmine threat.** Women are normally very knowledgeable of their surroundings, often because they are the main firewood and water collectors, and should be involved in information gathering and monitoring initiatives to identify landmine-affected areas in their communities and surrounding lands.
- **Setting clearance priorities.** The projected uses of cleared lands also need to be questioned, as men and women may have different intended uses and may therefore affect clearance priorities differently.
- **Marking.** Men and women both need to be taught how to recognise/identify the presence of landmines as well as how to mark the area appropriately (in line with

recognised standards). They also need to be involved in communicating findings to the community and/or the organisers of the landmine awareness campaigns.

- **Employment opportunities.** Following all of the above, both men and women also need to be involved – have access to – the employment opportunities that mine clearance can offer. Many women, having lost access to male labour in their own households because of mine incidents need to have access to the potential source of income.

Landmine awareness campaigns. Men and women both need to be targeted for landmine awareness – men because they are mobile, but women because they are also the prime caretakers of children, who can be very mobile. Women are responsible for informing all household members. They need to be taught how to recognise the signs and symbols that indicate the presence of mines and how best to act around them, what areas have been cleared and which have not. Ideally awareness campaigns should also include basic first aid information on how to assist mine victims should there be an uncontrolled detonation.

Victim assistance

Victim assistance refers to all care and rehabilitation activities that aim to meet the immediate and long-term needs of landmine survivors, their families, and mine-affected communities. In accordance with the definition developed by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the activities and concerns involved can be divided into nine categories as follows: Emergency medical care; Continuing medical care; Physical rehabilitation, prostheses and assistive devices; Psychological and social support; Employment and economic integration; Capacity-building and sustainability; Legislation and public awareness; Access; and, Data collection.

Women, War, Peace and Landmines, UNIFEM [28]

As mentioned above, women (and girls) victims of mines are likely to have different access patterns to medical assistance, treatment and rehabilitation. Men, women and children are also likely to suffer different forms of socio-economic and psychological trauma. For this reason it is very important that community based services be developed to respond to these needs. For example:

- **Immediate medical care/assistance**: both men and women medical staff need to be present to facilitate access by men and women victims to immediate treatment. Special wards and/or clinics need to be created if the community requires women to be treated separately or privately;
- **Rehabilitation assistance**: therapists, trainers and simple assistants need to be composed of men and women to ensure all victims have access to the required rehabilitative services. Special locations for the rehabilitation of women need to be created if required by the prevailing traditions of specific communities;
- **Prosthetics**: prosthetics need to be appropriately designed for and rendered available to both men, women and children of both sexes. Female orthopaedic staff need to be available to assist in the measuring, fitting and training in use of prosthetics for women;
- **Psycho-social wellness**: counselling, listening groups, peer support networks needs to be designed for men and women distinctly, according to what is most acceptable to the community at hand;
- **Employment and training**: any income-generating activities designed for the community need to take disabled men's and women's need into consideration, and both must have equal access to the services provided during and after capacity-building initiatives.
- **Access to credit**: special mechanisms need to be developed to assist disabled men and women to avail of financial assistance in reconstructing their livelihoods and household stability.

Construction and rental of prostheses. The demand for prosthetics in Afghanistan (and around the developing world) is very high but unfortunately, supply remains low. The main reasons for this are (a) that on a per person basis, prostheses are relatively expensive and (b) there is a lack of trained individuals, able to construct, fit and align them[29]. It is suggested that community women be targeted with training programmes in constructing simple, low-cost prostheses and other useful implements for the disabled, using locally available materials[30,31]. While they may not be of the same calibre of those constructed in industrialised countries, they could still respond to the immediate and pressing demand that rural areas are facing and for which there is no response, while also providing the women involved with a sustainable income-generating activity (prosthetic devices generally last for three to five years and must be regularly maintained, and children normally require new prostheses every six months). In addition to basic prostheses, equipment for disabled children can also be built using light-weight materials such as bamboo (cultivation of which is suggested in the section on natural resources)[32].

Security and conflict

Article Three

No law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter One: State

Article Fifty-six

Obedience of the provisions of the constitution, obedience of laws and respect of public order and security shall be the duty of all citizens of Afghanistan. Ignorance of the laws shall not be considered an excuse.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter Two: Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

In terms of perceptions of insecurity and conflict, while many shura provided no feedback on this issue, almost

half stated explicitly that there had been no major issues of concern for their communities during the year prior to the survey. On the other hand, the most common problem that was reportedly experienced was related to issues of a **political** nature which generated instances of insecurity and conflict in local communities.

Perceptions of insecurity and conflict in communities

No major issues	Land issues	Livestock issues	Water issues	Political issues	Other issues
49%	2%	1%	3%	5%	0%

Source: Men's shura data

Possible areas for intervention

In discussing issues of security from a gender perspective, the following are some of the questions that need to be asked:

- What type of security is being investigated (e.g, personal, household, social, political, economic, etc.)? What are the main causes of conflict for each?
- How is each type of security defined by men and women? What are some of the areas where women are more vulnerable and/or insecure? What are the areas that most affect men? Boys and girls?
- How do the issues identified in the NRVA (land, livestock, water, etc) affect women and men differently? How are they addressed and/or handled by each? What mechanisms are in place for men and women to turn to? What enforcement mechanisms exist?

The arena of security is one where women are very much at risk in many countries, regardless of the country's development phase. While it is a very complex arena, the following are some basic areas for intervention (many issues are cross-cutting and may also appear under topics such as education, health, mines, etc.):

Awareness-raising of laws and citizen rights. Men and women need to be well-informed of their rights as Afghan citizens, but also of their duties and obligations as per the Constitution of Afghanistan *and* all the international conventions to which it adheres (e.g., Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Charter, etc.). In this area, it is ***fundamental*** that activities target both men and women – it will be counter productive if awareness of women's rights is raised only in women as men will not be equipped with the knowledge and/or experience to adjust to changing demands in community and household women.

Community conflict-resolution and peace-building committees. Communities should be assisted in creating conflict resolution and peace-building committees that are composed of both men and women – or alternatively, created for men and women separately. Members should receive training in culturally appropriate and effective conflict-resolution techniques. At the same time, these committees need to be invested by the community with the authority to make decisions on community conflicts for their final resolution and/or escalation to higher political authorities. Based on data gathered through specific research on conflict-related issues, specific criteria for their discussion and resolution need to be outlined and adhered to in view of transparency and credibility of the committees in the community.

Islamic studies. Women need to be aware of the tenets of their own religion, and to understand Islam, they must learn to separate the religion from the cultural norms and styles of their own society[33]. They also need to be assisted in passing a correct understanding of their religion on to their daughters (and sons). Studies that focus on explaining the religion of Islam to women, and specifically aim to dispel incorrect interpretations need to be provided so that women are empowered to believe and follow the religion as it is intended to be.

Agricultural practices

Article Fourteen

To develop **agriculture** and animal husbandry, improve economic, social and living conditions of farmers, herders and settlers as well as improve the nomads livelihoods, the state, within its financial means, shall design and implement effective programs...

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter One: State

The most important agricultural livelihood practices around the country were **food cropping**, followed by **livestock/animal husbandry**, **cash cropping** and **cultivating orchards,** as reported by the district-level respondents.

First, second and third most important agricultural practices

	Cash cropping	Cultivation of opium	Food cropping	Orchards	Raising livestock	Working forest products	Other
1st	8%	4%	65%	7%	11%	4%	1%
2nd	13%	6%	20%	16%	36%	5%	2%
3rd	15%	5%	6%	10%	35%	5%	15%

Source: District data

In line with the above, interviews with men's wealth groups indicated that households in the three wealth groups cultivated the following crops (amount of land cultivated in jeribs [from-to]):

Average land cultivated for main crops by wealth group

	Rice		Maize		Oil seed		Cotton	
	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	T
Better off/ Medium	2.05	3.29	2.21	3.58	1.94	3.69	1.53	2.89
Poor	1.13	2.14	1.09	2.21	1.33	2.61	1.28	2.34
Very poor	0.85	1.74	0.88	1.89	1.00	2.06	1.05	2.11

Source: *Men's wealth group data*

In general, the amount of land cultivated with cereal during the growing season prior to the time of interview had **stayed the same** for most of the households in all wealth groups (although some households in all groups had seen an increase). Households in the better off/medium wealth group cultivated on average between

3.6 to 5.4 jeribs, while the poor cultivated **1.7 to 3.0** jeribs, and the very poor cultivated **0.9 to 1.6** jeribs.

Average land cultivated for cereal and crops by wealth group

	From	To	> LY	= LY	< LY
Better off/Medium	.	.	.	.	.
Cereal	3.57	5.44	20%	71%	5%
Food crop	0.32	0.59	7%	59%	1%
Other crop	0.33	0.63	9%	59%	0%
Poor	.	.	.	.	.
Cereal	1.74	2.97	17%	73%	4%
Food crop	0.18	0.34	6%	59%	0%
Other crop	0.15	0.32	7%	57%	0%
Very poor	.	.	.	.	.
Cereal	0.85	1.59	10%	70%	3%
Food crop	0.09	0.51	3%	57%	0%
Other crop	0.08	0.31	4%	56%	0%

Source: *Male wealth group data*

One quarter of the men's wealth groups interviewed said households in the better off/medium wealth group cultivated orchards and fruit trees. In general they cultivated a **mix of different fruits and nuts** (reported by 25% of the respondent groups who mentioned orchards were cultivated), **grapes** (29%), **apples** (12%), **apricots** (8%), **mulberry** (7%), **walnuts** and **almonds** (5%) and **pomegranates** (4%). 14% of the men's wealth groups stated that households in the poor wealth group also cultivated the same fruits, though in slightly different proportions –i.e., grapes (32%), mixed fruits (21%), mulberry (12%), apples and almonds (7%) and apricots and pomegranates (4%). Only 4% of the respondent groups indicated that households in the very poor wealth group cultivated fruits. While they produced the same ones as households in the other two wealth groups, they produced more grapes (44%), apples (22%) and mulberry (10%).

Cultivation of orchards and fruit trees

	Households **do** cultivate orchards	Households **do not** cultivate orchards
Better off/Medium	25%	75%
Poor	14%	86%
Very poor	4%	96%

Source: *Male wealth group data*

In relation to orchards and fruit trees, households in the better off/medium wealth group usually cultivated on average 1.3 jeribs of land and produced an average of 112 seer/man/local units of produce. Households in this wealth group kept 28% of their produce for their own household's consumption. Households in the poor wealth group normally cultivated 0.8 of a jerib, and produced an average of 90 seer/man/local units of fruit, 30% percent of which they also kept to meet household needs. Those in the very poor wealth group normally cultivated only 0.7 of a jerib, but produced on average 108 seer/man/local units of fruit, of which 26% was normally kept for household consumption.

Orchards: land and production averages

	Avg. jeribs cultivated	Avg. production (local units)	% of produce kept for household consumption
Better off/Medium	1.31	112.25	28
Poor	0.79	89.56	31
Very poor	0.66	108.41	26

Source: *Male wealth group data*

According to the household-level interviews, the major farming constraints faced during 2003 by women and men-headed households were as follows:

Main farming constraints for households

Women-headed households	**N= 1,149**
Lack of oxen/traction power	21%
Lack of farming land	18%
Lack of irrigation water	12%
Lack of seeds	6%
Lack of credit/cash	3%
Lack of fertilisers	2%
Lack of farm labour	1%
Lack of rainfall	1%
Men-headed households	**N= 9,038**
Lack of irrigation water	25%
Lack of oxen/traction power	21%
Lack of farming land	17%
Lack of seeds	11%
Lack of rainfall	3%
Lack of credit/cash	3%
Lack of fertilisers	2%

Source: *Household data*

In terms of crop pests and diseases, district-level respondents reported that the most common crop diseases experienced throughout the country were **rust** and **smut**, while **worms** were the most commonly experienced pest.

District-level respondents: crop pests and diseases

No major pests	Rust	Smut	Locusts	Worms	Other pests
12%	34%	33%	7%	9%	4%

Source: District data

Possible areas for intervention

As mentioned above, it is important to collect information on the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among men and women. In relation to agricultural practices of all kinds, the key questions remain:

- Who does what? How are the tasks required by the crop production cycle divided up between men and women? –i.e., who is responsible for the preparation of the land, sowing/seeding, weeding, irrigation, pest management, harvesting, etc. (While some information on the distribution of labour is provided by the NRVA (see page 25), more detailed data should be collected, possibly through agricultural surveys.)
- How much do men and women know about crop cycles and their requirements?
- What do they know about storage and food preparation? Who is responsible for the packing and storage of foods? What do they know about pre and post-harvest loss?

- Who has access to irrigation water? Who controls it? Are there water user groups/committees – are women involved?
- Who has access to agricultural machinery? Who controls it?
- Who takes care of crops? Who treats them for pests and diseases?

The following are some areas where women can be targeted to increase their participation and control over food and income-generating agricultural practices. Many of the activities revolve around the limited mobility and time availability, limited land ownership or access to land, and the limited access to tools for larger plot farming that affect most women in rural areas.

Hydroponics[34,35,36]. Hydroponics allow for the production of vegetables "without soil" in containers with water or in low-cost natural substrates (sand, rice skulls, pumice stone, etc.), and is highly appropriate in areas affected by lack of water and fertile land. Lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, garlic, watercress, aubergines, beans, parsley, radish, leek, strawberries, melons, flowers, aromatic and medicinal plants, are among the produce that can be grown. Hydroponic cultures require very little space and time, once properly established. In addition, because of the controlled environment, hydroponic cultures often do not suffer from weeds, soil-borne pests and diseases. Properly grown hydroponic plants also are healthier and more vigorous because all of the necessary growth elements are readily available directly in the water in which they are grown. All of the above make the introduction of hydroponics very suitable to women in both urban and rural areas[37].

Mushroom production[38,39]. Small-scale mushroom production represents a potentially rapid food and income-generating opportunity for women and women-headed households who do not have access to land (the growth/production cycle takes approximately 15 weeks). In addition, producing mushrooms can also play a role in managing farm organic wastes when agricultural and food processing by-products are used as growing media. The spent substrate can then be composted and applied directly back to the soil. Mushrooms also have undeniable nutritional and medicinal properties, as they contain essential amino acids, as well as some unsaturated fatty acids, several of the B vitamins, and vitamin D. Some even contain significant vitamin C, as well as the minerals potassium, phosphorus, calcium, and magnesium.

Sun drying fruits and vegetables[40]. The NRVA data show that almost one-third of the households surveyed had access to orchards. One area where women could easily be taught to augment the returns from fruit trees is by adequately drying fruits (and also vegetables to which they have access) for extended storage and/or sale on the market. Drying foods is one of the more healthy storage methods, and they can contribute to household dietary diversity and nutrition during seasons of agricultural scarcity. Drying is not difficult and it requires very little equipment – women can do it entirely in the home (apples and apricots, among the fruits reported in the NRVA data, are very easy to dry). Climactic conditions in many areas of Afghanistan are also conducive to sun drying as only circulating, dry, warm air is required. Simple packaging can allow for dried fruits to be sold on the market.

Community integrated pest management (IPM)[41].

"IPM is an approach to solving pest problems by applying knowledge about the pest to prevent them from damaging crops. IPM means responding to pest problems with the most effective least-risk option. Under an IPM approach, actions are taken to control insects, disease or weed problems only when their numbers exceed acceptable levels. When considering these actions, all pest management methods should be reviewed including natural, biological, cultural and chemical."

IPM Almanac[42]

NRVA data show that collectively, the majority of the communities interviewed experienced crop pests and diseases (primarily rust and smut for which some eco-friendly measures can be taken[43]) since the last main wheat harvest preceding the time of survey. In this regard, it is suggested that women be targeted with specific training in *integrated pest management*, possibly through the creation of Farmer Field Schools (see the FAO Community Integrated Pest Management programme in Asia), to assist them in reducing crop loss due to uncontrolled crop pest and disease proliferation. Correct use of IPM also helps reduce costs in crop management as it involves the rationalised use of pesticides, fertilisers and irrigation, geared at maximising results. Crop-specific IPM practices have been developed and can be selected based on local community production patterns.

Such trainings could/should target landless women –i.e., those who have not land of their own and therefore cannot earn income from agricultural practices directly, so that they can provide crop pest and disease management services to other farming households in the community.

Oxen/traction power rental services. NRVA data also show that women-headed households lack large livestock – specifically oxen – hence their main constraint in terms of agricultural practices during the year prior to the survey was related to the lack of oxen/traction power (though it was also a significant constraint for men-headed households as well). Women-headed households – even those with no land – should be assisted in purchasing one or more oxen and in developing a "rental" service for animal traction power that can be offered to the community – a practice that has been reportedly very successful in other countries[44]. There are however, numerous areas that need to be explored for such an initiative to be successful, among which, cultural taboos, gender-based ownership issues, fear of oxen, weight and design of animal-drawn implements, lack of understanding or of operational skills, and cost[45]. Communities would need to be approached on the issue to see how a new role for women in agriculture can be

constructed. Where it is not acceptable for women-headed households to manage such a business, husband and wife teams may be explored.

Rental of agricultural equipment and gardening tools. In Afghanistan, manual workers and draught animals will continue to provide the main source of power in agriculture for quite some time. Hence the importance of available and quality hand- and animal-operated farm implements. Men and women should be trained in the design, development and creation of basic (and even more advanced) farming and gardening implements that can be sold and/or rented to farming households in the community as a demand-based business. Training should ensure tools are designed to allow efficient and speedy work with the minimum of fatigue; are not dangerous or harmful to people or animals; are of simple design, so that they can be made locally; are as light in weight as possible for easy transportation; are ready for immediate use without loss of time for preparatory adjustments; and are made of easily available materials[46].

Drip irrigation techniques. Another major agricultural constraint faced by men and women-headed households alike was the lack of irrigation water. Women should be targeted for training in drip irrigation techniques, again so they can develop services that can be provided to the community's farming households[47]. Drip irrigation can be extremely useful in locations experiencing water shortage (common in Afghanistan) and it carries with it a series of additional benefits –i.e., very little water is lost through runoff, deep percolation or evaporation; irrigation can be scheduled based on crop requirements; water contact with crop leaves, stems, and fruits is radically reduced (conditions that can favour the onset of diseases); fertilisers and pesticides are can be used more efficiently and in smaller quantities (thus reducing related costs). In addition, drip irrigation technology is very adaptable to fields with odd shapes or uneven topography[48].

Seed multiplication. Lessons learnt by NGOs operating in seed multiplication initiatives in Africa have revealed that, among other things, there is naturally more participation in seed multiplication by women; that resource-poor farmers given sufficient support (certified seed and training) are capable of producing good quality seed; that adoption of seed multiplication by smallholder farmers has led to increased seed availability and crop diversification, which has led some farmers to adopt seed multiplication as a viable enterprise[49]. Women should be targeted for technical training in seed multiplication techniques in areas of Afghanistan where the ICARDA research stations have been / or will be established (Kabul, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar, Nangarhar) so that they can work in or in collaboration with the centres in developing quality small-scale seed multiplication activities[50].

Conscientious consumerism. In view of all of the above, community-level training in the values of organic foods and environmentally safe agricultural production methods should be conveyed to men and women to encourage consumption – and poduction – of such products.

Land tenure

Article Forty

Property shall be safe from violation. No one shall be forbidden from owning property and acquiring it, unless limited by the provisions of law. No one's property shall be confiscated without the order of the law and decision of an authoritative court.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter Two: Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

Interviews with women's shura indicated that the women-headed households living in the communities they represented could own from **1.8 to 2.8 jeribs** on average, while others could share crop from **1.1 to 1.8** jeribs and other still could rent from **1.5 to 2.3** jeribs of land.

Land tenure for women-headed households

Owned (From)	Owned (To)	Share crop (From)	Share crop (To)	Rented (From)	Rented (To)
1.82	2.77	1.06	1.78	1.51	2.30

Source: *Women's shura data*

Men's wealth groups interviewed reported the following figures on land ownership for the households in their communities:

Land tenure for households

	# of Jeribs From	# of Jeribs To
Better off/Medium	.	.
Owned	4.93	7.30
Share Cropped	5.16	6.91
Rented	3.38	5.15
Poor	.	.
Owned	2.69	3.93
Share cropped	2.52	3.76
Rented	2.25	3.08
Very poor	.	.
Owned	1.90	2.32
Share cropped	3.39	5.08
Rented	2.33	2.85

Source: *Male wealth group data*

Possible areas for intervention

The data on land tenure collected from men's wealth groups were broken down by wealth group while those collected from the women's shura were not. Nonetheless, it would appear evident that the range of land normally owned by women-headed households is much lower than than owned by men-headed households.

Still, more research needs to be carried out in the area specifically of the land ownership and rights of women. Questions that need answers include, among others:

- What exactly are the provisions of customary, *shari'a*, and statutory law on women's land rights? Which are to prevail? What mechanisms are in place to enforce said provisions? To whom can women turn to denounce

any situations of conflict and/or abuse related to land tenure issues?

- What are the traditional practices that affect women's land tenure? When is land taken away and when is it obtained?
- What factors affect the amount of land women can have? What factors affect whether men or women have priority over land plots?
- What are the land rights of returnees? Specifically, women returnees?
- Are men and women affected differently by share-cropping and land mortgaging arrangements? What are the factors that lead to this?
- What are the most common needs of rural women with regards to land? Do they have different preferences than men?

Most areas for intervention in land tenure issues lie at the policy level, as much work still needs to be done in putting land relations, tenure issues and norms on the national agenda. What is important is that from the beginning, such efforts recognise and reflect the needs of both men and women distinctly.

Institutional responsibility for land tenure issues must foresee an authoritative role for the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which should hopefully develop the capability to obtain information from its Department of Women's Affairs offices in the provinces on current issues affecting women in this arena. Also, while the process of resolution of land issues and related policy development must be *"informed by practical efforts of land conflict resolution in strategically selected rural areas"*[51] concrete actions must be taken to ensure such processes specifically solicit community women's active participation and explicitly address their needs and concerns.

The development of a reliable and accessible legal basis for land rights and management must also be orchestrated to specifically and explicitly reflect women's rights alongside men's rights. It must not simply present "citizen's" rights, which would invariably – in a society where women do not customarily benefit of the same rights of men – continue to exclude women from the stipulations and protection of the law.

Still, while the above processes begin – or continue – to take shape and produce hopefully gender-specific outputs, bottom-up initiatives can nonetheless be undertaken by the development community to encourage the formation of community-based land dispute resolution committees. These should be designed to include men and women equally, or where not feasible, should be designed separately for men and women. Committees should be informed of the prevailing land laws and procedures should be developed for the handling of local land disputes.

Livestock

Article Fourteen

To develop agriculture and **animal husbandry**, improve economic, social and living conditions of farmers, herders and settlers as well as improve the nomads livelihoods, the state, within its financial means, shall design and implement effective programs...

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter One: State

Sheep and **goats** were the most commonly held livestock in the communities of the men's shura interviewed around the country, followed by donkeys, cows and bulls. Ownership of all livestock was heavily with the better off/medium wealth groups, with the households in the very poor wealth group owning **only 5%** of the total number of community livestock.

Community livestock totals

	Total	BO%	M%	P%	VP%
Sheep	370,696	41%	35%	16%	4%
Goats	307,642	32%	37%	22%	6%
Cows	85,649	31%	42%	25%	4%
Bulls	66,743	30%	42%	25%	4%
Oxen	20,779	44%	43%	14%	1%
Donkeys	108,295	20%	39%	31%	10%
Horses	3,636	81%	33%	8%	1%
Camels	8,911	30%	45%	20%	3%
Totals	**972,351**	**34%**	**37%**	**21%**	**5%**

Source: *Men's shura data*

Ownership of livestock in women-headed households was reported by the women's shura interviewed around the country, and was very meagre at best. The following table indicates the average range of individual animals that women-headed households were likely to have:

Ownership of livestock by women-headed households

Poultry	Sheep	Goat	Milking cows	Bulls / oxen	Donkeys
3-5	0-1	1	0	0	0

Source: *Women's shura data*

According to 45% of the men's shura interviewed around the country, the number of community livestock had **increased** from the previous year, while 30% said it had stayed the same and 22% said it had actually decreased.

In terms of livestock diseases, the majority of the district-level respondents stated that **foot and mouth** disease had been experienced around the country during the year preceding the survey.

District-level respondents: livestock diseases

No major diseases	Anthrax	Pasturellosis	Black leg	Foot and Mouth	Other diseases
5%	7%	4%	5%	72%	6%

Source: District data

Possible areas for intervention

Community livestock production systems can fall into different categories: transhumant, agro-pastoralist, intensive crops and livestock, and peri-urban intensive systems. In turn, these systems can be further categorised based on their foreseen role for women[52]:

- There is no involvement by women;

- Women are responsible only for processing products;
- Women are responsible for managing and processing small stock and other animals kept at the homestead; and;
- Women responsible for managing and herding large stock and other animals, and for the processing of livestock produce.

More research needs to be undertaken in Afghanistan to identify which patterns are common to the various communities – and it would be interesting to see if these patterns are associated more predominantly to one or another agro-ecological zone, as well as to study the range of gender-based social perceptions relating to livestock ownership – particularly large livestock, such as cows, oxen, camels, and horses.

Clearly much work needs to be done to improve women's level of livestock ownership as well as their ability to generate income from livestock-related products. The following are some areas where activities could be undertaken to this end:

Livestock loans and comprehensive training in animal husbandry. First and foremost, special activities need to be developed to target women with adequate training in requesting and utilising micro-finance loans for the purchase of livestock. Women must be well informed of the returns associated with livestock and their maintenance, as research has shown that women have often ***not*** benefited from the purchase of livestock because of their lack of knowledge and/or understanding of the demands and cycles of livestock production, their lack of access to technical support, lack of understanding of feed preparation and raw material cycles and requirements, scarce ability to market products, and a lack of understanding of the impact of over-grazing and/or direct environmental damage or contamination[53].

Women Animal Health Workers. Women are often traditionally responsible for animals kept at the homestead, e.g., small stock, calves, poultry or sick animals; they may be responsible for caring for and counting the grazing animals as they come home for the night, and for signalling any problems (sickness, birthing, poor health, missing animals, etc.)[54]. Special training initiatives should be designed for women – even those having no livestock – to become Animal Health Workers. It is important for communities to be able to recognise livestock diseases and to be able to either treat them and/or curtail their spread to other members of the herd. Women with such skills and knowledge could provide a service to other livestock owners in the community while earning income for their own households. As a component of the training programme, community awareness needs to be raised on the importance of recognising and consulting the Animal Health workers about household livestock issues. Women formally recognised by the community as animal health workers or "doctors" also benefit socially and personally[55]

Rabbit breeding. Although rabbits are not traditionally part of the Afghan diet, it is suggested that women be introduced to rabbit farming as a means of (a) improving dietary diversity and nutritional intake, (b) creating an income-generating opportunity from the sale of excess animals and (c) obtaining valid by-products such as fur. Raising rabbits is relatively easy and rapid – a breeder can start with two females and one male and produce fifty or more rabbits in one year. Fifty to 150 females can set the basis for a business which provides part-time employment and extra income. Rabbits are easy to raise at home, their hutches do not take up a lot of space, and they are clean, quiet and easy to care for. In countries like Afghanistan, where the climate can be harsh during the fall and winter seasons, rabbit skins can also be valuable as they can be made into hats, fur-trimmed collars, slippers, pillows, small rugs, etc[56,57].

Goat farming using *Leucaena* feed. Goat are very common in Afghanistan and it would appear that women can have ownership of these smaller animals. Special initiatives should be designed to (a) train women in goat production and maintenance, (b) train in planting and harvesting of *Leucaena* trees as feed, and (c) provide micro-financing for the purchase of goats and saplings upon completion of the training activity. Research has shown that *Leucaena* based feeding of goats can increase income, while also improving local soil fertility and the subsequent crop yields of permanent crops[58]. At the same time, planting of *Leucaena* has also been shown to help in soil erosion control[59].

Poultry farming. Poultry projects are well-known for providing women with a source of income – but also meat and eggs for the family, manure for crop production, feathers, items for traditional rituals and gifts for friends. Field research has also shown that projects designed to follow the traditional scavenging system (where chicken are allowed to roam free and scavenge off the ground), through which women receive training in and have access to poultry health services, and mechanisms for placing and delivering poultry products to the local market are generally more successful than those that attempt to introduce new breeds, or innovate feeding and breeding methods[60]. Poultry activities for women should be designed to target the most vulnerable women in rural areas taking all of these factors into consideration.

Goose farming. Geese are not common in Afghanistan, however, their introduction should be explored for a variety of reasons. Geese are very strong and easy to raise (comparatively easier to raise and more resistant than chickens), they have adapted to cold climates, they provide very nutritious meat and large eggs, and they also offer feathers and down. In addition to all of this, they are excellent household "watchdogs" and may be of assistance in protecting vulnerable households[61]. It is suggested that women be targeted with quality technical training in farming this new animal, with a view in the

short run to utilising goose feathers and down for the production of down blankets and pillows (particularly useful for the colder areas of the country, given that they are also very light but very warm). Goose plucking can be done at the home, as can be the cleaning and preparation of final down products. Integration of goose food products can only take place – given time – through the dissemination of appropriate food preparation techniques and awareness-raising of the advantages of goose meat.

Environmentally sound leather tanning. The use of leather is common throughout Afghanistan, particularly for the fabrication of the *kulai qaraqul* (the traditional leather hats men wear). Other leather products are also commonly used (e.g., for harnesses, shoes, bags, etc). However, due to lack of modern tanning equipment and materials, raw materials have often been sent to Pakistan for tanning and preparation, and then returned to Afghanistan for working. It is suggested that women be targeted with quality training in vegetable tanning procedures. Vegetable tanning of leather can be done using locally available materials, it can be used to produce various types of quality leather (depending on the quality control of the tanner), and it is environmentally friendly. Vegetable tanning can be done at the household and/or community level, and there is no need for machines – in terms of tanning agents, one of the best is black tea, which is abundantly available[62]. Women's groups should be developed and guided in surveying community needs, producing required leather products and marketing them locally.

Traditional cheese making[63,64]. Cheese making is a well-established practice in Afghanistan (largely practiced by the Kuchi), but product diversity is still weak and production (and availability) is largely seasonal. Making cheese is a way of utilising excess production of milk, but it also provides a nutritious food source for the household. It is suggested that groups of women in select communities be targeted with quality technical training in the production of both soft and hard cheeses (hard cheeses can be consumed throughout the year) as well as goat and sheep cheeses, so as to establish small cheese making factories for local market consumption.

Markets

In general, most of the population could access markets within their own districts – however not a small number were obliged to move to the provincial market in order to reach market supplies. 62% of the district-level respondents indicated that market supply was generally **good all year round**, but 26% stated that it was reduced during the **winter** season. 7%, 3% and 2% of the district-level respondents stated that market supply was reduced during the spring, summer and fall seasons respectively.

District-level respondents: vicinity to permanent market

In own district	In neighbouring district	Provincial market	Neighbouring province
46%	10%	36%	8%

Source: District data

With regard to the time it took households to get to the closest permanent food market, 74% of the men's shura interviewed indicated that households in their communities could get to the market with **less than ¼ day's travel** by car (for an average cost of **32** Afghanis).

Number of men's shura who indicated travel time to markets

In the community	< ¼ day	¼ to ½ day	½ to 1 day	> 1 day	Avg. cost Afghanis.
20%	54%	16%	8%	2%	32

Source: *Men's shura data*

Given the above, the men's shura interviewed were asked how often vehicle transportation to the market was available in their communities. 37% said it was available on a **daily** basis, while 39% said it was available **weekly**. 16% of the shura mentioned it was available to their communities on a **monthly** basis, while 1% said it was only **seasonal.** 7% of the shura said their communities **never** had access to vehicle transportation. Discussions with men's wealth groups revealed the following pattern on household access to the markets by wealth group:

Frequency of household access to permanent food markets

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Seasonal	Never
Better off/Medium	8%	67%	21%	3%	0%
Poor	7%	60%	30%	3%	0%
Very poor	6%	53%	36%	4%	0%

Source: *Men's wealth group data*

Interviews with the women's shura revealed the following pattern for the women-headed households in their communities. At the same time, the shura were divided about women's use of vehicle transport to the market (if and when available): 28% of the shura said women in their communities often went to the market by **vehicle**, while 21% said they did so only **sometimes** and 36% said women in their communities **never** went to the market by vehicle:

Frequency of women-headed household access to permanent food markets

Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Season	Never
3%	36%	33%	4%	8%

Source: *Women's shura data*

Beside gathering information on the use of vehicle transportation, the women's shura were also asked how women from women-headed households in their communities normally went to the market, e.g., whether alone or in company, etc. **14%** indicated that women in their communities were quite likely to go to the market **by themselves**, while 15% of the shura said the women in their communities were more likely to **send someone** else on their behalf. 13% said they would likely **pay someone** to go to the market for them, while 12% of the shura said women would probably send their own **children**. By far,

most of the shura said women were more likely to send a **relative** to the market on their behalf.

Accompaniment of women to markets

Went alone	Sent someone	Paid someone	Sent own children	Sent a relative	Other
14%	15%	13%	12%	31%	0%

Source: *Women's shura data*

The men's shura interviewed were also asked how the women of women-headed households in their communities were most likely to go to the market – their answers are tabled below and are largely consistent with those reported by the women's shura above:

Accompaniment of women to markets

	Go alone	Send someone	Pay someone	Send children	Send relative	Other
Better off/ Medium	16%	5%	14%	6%	58%	1%
Poor	13%	5%	15%	9%	58%	0%
Very poor	14%	5%	14%	11%	56%	1%

Source: *Men's shura data*

Possible areas for intervention

One of the main areas that needs to be explored further is that explaining *why* men and women-headed households only go the market on a weekly or monthly basis. What needs to be better understood is whether the issues affecting access to markets are determined by household need (e.g., sufficient food is available in the house to not require more frequent visits), time availability (requiring detailed information on the domestic and non-domestic workload of men and women), or ease/difficulty of physical accessibility (lack of roads, transportation etc.).

"Distance to markets, aggravated by inadequate roads and transport, creates difficulties for poor men and women, and reduces their chances of escaping poverty. Such constraints tend to affect women even more than men. Where males act as intermediaries for women's market transactions, women normally do not get all the proceeds."

2001 Rural Poverty Report
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

The *2001 Rural Poverty Report* (IFAD) identifies issues of how poor access tend to affect women more than men. These are[65]:

- **Market access for the sale of agricultural and non-farm produce and products**: Although women are normally involved in production for family consumption, they also need to have access to more distant markets when there is oversupply in the local ones or when prices are better farther away. However, because of difficulties in access, women often need husbands or older sons to do the marketing, resulting in the latter usually keeping part of the proceeds;
- **Market access for women traders**. Women traders often need to spend a considerable proportion of their income on transport to market when they are reliant on others.
- **Market access for purchase of inputs and technology**. Women, like men, are disadvantaged if traders, inputs and technology cannot reach villages because of poor roads and/or distance. If the farm family needs to go to town to purchase required items, it is usually the man who goes. One IFAD/FAO study found this can mean that women do not always get what they need, as in the case of appropriate agricultural tools.
- **Access to labour markets**. In much of the developing world, landless or land-poor rural people earn some income in labour markets, often on a seasonal basis. When women also undertake such work, the physical distance of labour markets and the lack of transport make it more difficult for them to combine domestic and work responsibilities.

It would also be interesting to explore the reasons for which many women in the communities interviewed prefer to send a relative to the market on their behalf. Again, is this related to their workload –i.e., they cannot afford to be absent from the home very often, is it because there is no transportation, is it for security reasons, or is it because they are simply not comfortable going on their own because of prevailing socio-cultural constructs?

While a deeper investigation into some of the above will surely reveal other areas where activities and assistance for women can be designed to improve their access to markets, the following are also some possible areas for exploration and intervention:

Village and market access roads. The construction of roads is seen as a labour-intensive, high-technology and high-cost endeavour. There is no doubt that roads are essential to development, but there is no evidence to point to the need for high-tech high-cost roads in rural areas where the main concerns are village mobility and market access. There is instead abundant evidence to show that having the means of communication and access is more important than its quality. Hence, the importance of utilising truly low-cost techniques in the development of such access roads. It is suggested that community groups of men and women (each with a group leader) be involved in the creation of earth roads using special techniques that revolve around the use of locally available materials (e.g., wood, pegs, stones) and animal traction power or tractors[66,67]. All development can be labour-based and large machinery ***is not required***. It is particularly important that women be part of the surveying teams that determine which roads to build and where, to ensure that their access needs are also taken into consideration.

Road management committees. If village and market earth access roads are constructed, it is suggested that community-based road management committees be created, composed of men and women, and possibly the road construction team leaders (one man and one woman). This committee would be responsible for overseeing the conditions and maintenance of the

community's access roads. Ideally it should establish relations with the provincial departments of the Ministry of Transport to have access to state funds for maintenance and repair. Community-based reporting mechanisms should be established for men and women to comment and report on the conditions of the roads on a regular basis.

Improved and increased options for load transport by people. One big problem in accessing markets for women, besides pure distance, is the need to transport as much as possible on any single trip, which is normally done by foot. While head-load, head-straps and shoulder-straps seem to be the absolute most common forms of transportation for women (though they all carry risks of physical damage to the neck and spine over time, and can be unstable and/or difficult to load and unload unassisted), there are a number of other simple load transportation mechanisms that could easily be constructed locally (also by women if adequately trained) – using locally available materials, and/or bamboo if it were to be cultivated – and sold to community men and women for their daily use[68]. It is suggested that these options be presented to women in various communities, the most appropriate to their transport needs identified, and that they be trained in their construction. Community-based sale and rental services can be established to assist women in earning income through this process, while also improving their own load transport ability[69].

Diversification and construction of animal-drawn carts. There are actually a wide variety of animal-cart types, though knowledge of and familiarity with many of these have been lost over the years as communities continue to hope for and expect increased access to vehicles and better roads. Yet such expectations have still to be met, and many rural households resort to walking and/or using simple, old animal-drawn carts. It is suggested that women and men teams be involved in the construction, sale and rental of different forms of animal-drawn carts (for oxen, donkey, camel and horse harness for example, given the presence of these animals in many rural communities in Afghanistan) and that different types of carts be prepared to be selected based on end-user need (e.g., passenger delivery, water transportation, tipping cart, stake-sided cart, etc.)[70]. As with most of the suggestions provided so far, a community based service centre could be established, also providing maintenance and repair services for community customers who have purchased cart equipment.

Community food delivery service. Regardless of the reasons for which men and women may not be able to access markets easily, one solution might be to establish a community-based "home delivery" service determined by individual household needs. Ideally, a husband and wife team, with access to vehicle transportation, could collect "orders" from the various household in the community, proceed to the closest market to purchase all of what is required and then return to the community for distribution of purchases to the respective households. Commissioning households would pay upfront the market price of the merchandise, transportation costs (which would be reduced as they would be divided among all participating households) plus a small service fee to the market-going team. This would provide income-generating opportunities for the procuring teams while at the same time facilitating women's access to market products. (This solution would only address procurement issues.)

Community water delivery service. Collection of water is a task normally assigned to women, and women often spend a great part of their day searching for and transporting water back to the home. Given the weight of water, there is a limit to how much can be carried on a given trip, which makes trips necessarily more frequent and the time away from the home greater. Access to water points/sources may also be an issue. It is suggested that with the aid of an animal or person pulled water carrying cart (appropriately designed, see above) women be assisted in setting up water delivery services for their communities. One, two or a group of women with a cart capably of carrying sufficient quantities of water to meet community household needs, provided with an adequate number of containers for water distribution (possibly obtained from local plastic or other recycling activities) and simple facilities for the purification (e.g., filtering, boiling, see below section on health) could establish a profitable household drinking/cooking water provision service.

Labour and income generation

Article Forty-eight

Work is the right of every Afghan. Working hours, paid holidays, employment and employee rights and related matters shall be regulated by law. Choice of occupation and craft shall be free within the bounds of law.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter Two: Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

District-level respondents indicated that the most important non-farm practices in this area were **labouring, petty trading** and **carpet weaving** (reported by 61%, 8% and 7% of the district-level respondents respectively). Other activities reported included shop keeping (6%), masonry (2%) government employment and military service (2%) and smuggling (1%). Interviews with men's shura detailed other labour opportunities and their availability to their communities by season.

Labour opportunities by season

	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
Planting of crops	13%	55%	26%	**61%**
Irrigating of crops	6%	43%	32%	31%
Harvesting of crops	5%	28%	**74%**	39%
Other farm labour	10%	51%	48%	39%
Construction	8%	**59%**	67%	49%
Handicrafts	9%	9%	9%	10%
Weaving	15%	13%	13%	15%
Embroidery	10%	8%	10%	10%
Tailoring	16%	17%	16%	16%
Mining / gold panning	0%	1%	1%	1%

Barter and Trade	**31%**	46%	45%	43%
Collecting firewood	11%	27%	36%	44%
Collecting other resource	2%	13%	12%	12%
Shepherding	13%	36%	35%	31%

Source: Men's shura data

Information on the distribution of labour between men, women and children was gathered from interviews with wealth groups. Information on women's labour opportunities was collected from men's wealth groups and women's wealth groups separately where possible. Differences in perceptions (or community awareness of women's activities) can be seen in the table.

Distribution of labour between men, women and children

Labour type	Men's wealth group data						Women's wealth group	
	Men		Women		Children		Women	
	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D
Planting of crops	2	13	1	9	2	8	3	13
Irrigating of crops	3	7	2	7	2	4	2	11
Harvesting of crops	2	15	1	13	3	12	2	12
Other farm labour	2	12	2	12	3	8	3	12
Construction	4	16	.	.	.	.	.	.
Handicrafts	5	14	**5**	**15**	4	15	4	14
Weaving	5	17	4	17	3	16	4	15
Embroidery	.	.	.	.	**5**	**13**	4	13
Tailoring	.	.	.	.	3	15	4	12
Mining / gold panning	3	17	.	.	.	.	.	.
Barter and Trade	5	17	.	.	.	.	.	.
Domestic work for others	.	.	3	14	2	9	4	12
Collecting firewood	3	14	3	13	4	13	3	13
Collecting other resource	2	14	2	12	2	9	2	12
Shepherding	**6**	**24**	4	24	3	19	3	21
Relief activities	2	12	.	.	2	17	**10**	**23**
Other	3	16	2	13	2	5	6	16

52% of the men's wealth groups interviewed stated that households in the better off/medium wealth group earned other income by carrying out a series of **other** activities, some **small trade**, the collection and sale of **wild plants** and bushes, **sewing** and **tailoring** and **rug weaving** and production of **artisan** work. 45% of the men's wealth groups said the same for households in the poor wealth group, as did 41% for households in the very poor wealth group.

Discussions with women's shura revealed that on average, only **15%** of the households in their communities had women who were earning income in the home, in the village or outside the village.

Women's earnings

Total households	142,405	%	B%	M%	P%	VP%
Earning at home	12,081	**8%**	12%	31%	36%	22%
Earning in the village	8,271	**6%**	1%	11%	47%	42%
Earning outside the village	1,146	**1%**	22%	22%	14%	34%

Source: *Women's shura data*

In terms of women's participation in food-for-work and/or cash-for-work activities, 39% of the shura stated households in the very poor wealth group in their communities had women who had participated in **cash-for-work** and **food-for-work** activities. A few shura reported that women in households in the better off/medium and poor wealth groups also participated in such activities.

Women's participation in relief/assistance activities

	BY	MY	PY	VPY
Cash-for-work activities	1%	2%	2%	39%
Food-for-work-activities	0%	1%	1%	39%

Source: Women's shura data

Possible areas for intervention

Income-generation for women has become the catch-all mandate and objective of various development agencies in Afghanistan striving to demonstrate action in the area of *gender*. This has however, lead to the implementation of a series of unsuccessful and unsustainable vocational training initiatives that have solely contributed to perpetrating the image of women as carpet weavers and embroiderers. Few are the vocational training initiatives that have effectively provided women with skills that they are able to market independently and earn income from.

Vocational training initiatives ***must*** be based on a ***true*** assessment of community needs – these are what determine local market demand. There is a saturation point for all non-essential items e.g., embroideries, as there is also a saturation point in market labour needs e.g., the number of tailors per a given community. Vocational training can be most successful when it is designed to respond to a community need that cannot be rapidly saturated –i.e., primary needs such as food, water, tools for livelihood practices, sanitation, light, heat, etc. The following are only some of the areas where vocational training could be justified (among others mentioned in other sections of this report). It remains a vast area for intervention, but intervention must be done with caution and responsibility.

Candle making. The NRVA data on household assets (see page 32) show that both men and women-headed households are unlikely to have access to electricity. While electricity serves many purposes, its main purpose in rural households is that of providing light and possibly heating (though the latter is largely taken care of through fires and cooking stoves). Hence the suggestion that women be targeted for training in candle-making oriented to meeting community needs for light-providing candles. Of note in this case: the suggestion is ***not*** to make scented, elegant, flowered candles for the foreign market as this is *not* a primary need. Candle making should focus on the production *en masse* of simple, low-cost white wax candles that can be sold at the local market to community household members[71]. These candles can be made using simple instruments, available in rural areas (or even home made) and can be made using paraffin, beeswax, tallow (animal by-product – the production of which should also be explored), and vegetable waxes[72]. ***Note***: if carefully planned, candle makers may purchase beeswax from local beekeepers (see section on areas for intervention in natural resource management), thus also sustaining the latter.

Basic tools and implements. According to the NRVA data, men are often involved in construction, while men, women and children are involved in other farm labour and activities at various times during the year. Clearly, there will be a constant need for small implements and tools to assist them in their work. It is suggested that women be targeted for training in the surveying of needed tools and their production. Hammers, chisels, drills, screwdrivers, tongs, tweezers, etc. are all tools that can be constructed using locally available materials (wood, scrap metals, nails) for both spot/temporary and permanent use[73]. Women (and their husbands, if opportune) could set up a workshop for the production, sale and/or rental of such equipment for community household use.

Furniture and utensils for the home. In collaboration with bamboo cultivating households and/or communities, women could be trained in the design and production of simple household furniture for everyday use. Rural households in Afghanistan are simple and sparsely furnished, and basic furniture and utensils (small tables, chairs, shelves, beds, brooms, carpet beaters, etc.) could be very useful. As home caretakers, women would be in the best position to assess what furniture and utensils would be most useful and could also market and sell products to other women in the community[74].

Basic Sewing Machine Repair. The traditional involvement of women in sewing and tailoring has lead to the introduction of sewing machines (mostly in urban and sub-urban centres). As the most frequent users of the equipment, it is suggested that women be targeted with technical training in sewing machine repair. Repair centres could either be established in local women's development or resource centres, so that women would be safe to go there on their own, or alternatively, women without problems of mobility could visit other women in their homes where they are likely to keep their sewing machines. This will provide and income-generating opportunity for the sewing machine "mechanics" that is likely to be constant given the importance of home-based tailoring[75].

Mobile telephone technicians. Mobile phones are the telecommunications solution adopted by Afghanistan, hence the great need for maintenance and repair services. Women in urban and sub-urban centres should be targeted for training in mobile phone troubleshooting and mechanical repair. Like with sewing machines, service centres can either be established in existing women's centre or in the home – as mobile phone sets are small they can be easily transported either way[76].

Crumb rubber production (tyre recycling) and tyre crafting. Road travel in Afghanistan is often the only means of bulk transportation and delivery both in the country as well as across boarders. This implies significant heavy-duty truck fleets on the roads, high demand for heavy-duty truck tires, and related high tyre waste. It is suggested that women be targeted for two main activities: (a) recycling of tyres to produce crumb rubber (however significant external investment in recycling plant equipment will be required and should be investigated with interested donors[77]) and (b) tyre crafting, which involves using discarded tyres for a series of other uses such as creating containing walls (good for soil erosion and landscaping), productive vertical gardening spaces, composting bins (or barrels, made by placing tyres flat one on top of the other), etc[78]. Crumb rubber has extensive applications, among which the production of rubber modified asphalt (RMA)[79] for which it is likely there will be a strong market in Afghanistan, given the country's current road rehabilitation agenda (the benefits to using RMA include decreased rutting, reflective and thermal cracking, better de-icing properties - important in Afghanistan – reduced traffic noise, lower maintenance costs and significantly increased service life[80]). There are also a series of other uses for crumb rubber (e.g., toys, shoes, small rubber components, etc) for which a market in Afghanistan is also very likely to exist. This is a very interesting sector that needs to be further explored, but a key role for women in the recycling process could be defined through pro-active investigation.

Shoes (flip-flops). Throughout most of the year, the most commonly seen footwear on Afghan men and children is the rubber or plastic flip-flops/sandals. While the fabrication of closed, leather shoes for men and women has been attempted with women's groups, the production costs are high, the number of units produced per day is very low and returns are non-existent. However, if crumb rubber and/or any other form of available recycled rubber could be obtained locally, women could be trained to make flip-flops as a very marketable, quick and easy to produce form of footwear that could be sold even in remote areas where local markets are less likely to be saturated with similar products coming from China and Pakistan[81].

Waste recycling. There are currently no formal waste management and/or recycling programmes in Afghanistan, which places the country at great risk in this sector[82]. While there need to be policy-level agenda for this type of initiative to take off sustainably around the country, it is suggested that women begin to be trained in waste separation and recycling methods. There is great need and creating employment opportunities from waste is guaranteed once the state provides mechanisms for the absorption of the collected waste. Until then, women can be trained in eco-friendly waste recycling processes to the benefit of the community and the environment. Waste is plentiful, it is free, it requires little capital, and it can sell for cash or be used to generate other things that will. At the same time, waste products are familiar (there is nothing new to learn or familiarise with), and removing it is appreciated by the community[83]. Training initiatives in this area need to gather data on the predominant types of waste in the target area and identify the most beneficial practices for its collection, separation and treatment.

Business Development Services (BDS). While development interventions can play a solid role in providing women with opportunities to take on social responsibilities (e.g., creating consortia for vocational activities, micro-credit groups, etc.) women's own success is often hindered by their lack of basic literacy and small business management skills. Failure at managing small initiatives only reconfirm the socially held perception that they are not capable of being economically independent, in leading roles and positions.

While many development organisations promote vocational training, often followed by basic business and management training, what women truly need are apprenticeship opportunities and/or longer-term *mentoring /coaching* programme components. Truly sustainable business/enterprise development (or even simple income-generating) programmes must provide women with "on-the-job" training as is commonly provided in all other developed countries. For women emerging from decades – or in the case of young women a lifetime – of seclusion and scarce independence and self-responsibility, entering into even the simplest of income-generating activities can be difficult. Often women fail to see the longer-term benefits of vocational training, as many vocational/business training initiatives are perceived as short-term paid labour opportunities. Women are not used to thinking of their future as being in their own hands, and many women have become accustomed to not taking the lead in their own lives (another side of this is seen in their lack of control over child-bearing, household finances and personal earnings, as portrayed by the NRVA data). As un-poetic as it may seem, ensuring women truly succeed in learning to earn from and maintain marketable skills will provide them with one of the first building blocks of social belongingness and ultimately self-realisation, both of which are fundamental for an improved outlook on life and social acceptance.

Having said the above, women need comprehensive quality training in, and access to, business development services (BDS) and skills. Programmes need to be long-term – short term interventions are not useful. In addition, BDS programmes need to be designed specifically taking women's needs, experience and perspectives into account[84,85].

Migration and employment patterns

Households-level interviews revealed that 5% of the women-headed households interviewed had one or more household members who had been away from home during the year prior to the survey – most had been in other **rural** parts of Afghanistan, but some had been in other **urban** areas and some had been to **Pakistan/Iran.** The two reasons most mentioned for their absence were the insufficient **work opportunities** and the **lack of security** in their home communities. 6% of the men-headed households had one or more household members who had been away, in the same areas as those from women-headed households, because of insufficient income and work opportunities.

Figures on household member employment show that on average 38% of the women-headed households had at least one household member who had worked during the seven days preceding the time of interview, whereas the figure was 41% for the men-headed households. In both cases, one-third of the households had household members who would be interested in working more if there were more work opportunities available. Most of the members of the women-headed households who were reported to have worked, were primarily involved in **agriculture,** followed by **manufacturing textiles**, some construction and a little hunting or gathering. Working household members from the men-headed households were also primarily involved in agriculture, but they were also involved in construction, other activities, some trade, education and/or health, and hunting or gathering.

Household budget, debts and remittances

Just over 50% of the women's wealth groups interviewed stated that women across wealth groups **were able to make decisions** on the use of the household income, while almost 70% on average felt women could also spend their own earnings. Just under 40% of the women's wealth groups interviewed felt women across all wealth groups were able to **participate** in decision-making regarding the purchase or sale of productive and non-productive household assets.

Women's involvement with household budget

	Yes	Some-times	No
Better off/Medium			
Household income	22%	30%	47%
Spending of own earnings	38%	29%	31%
Sale/purchase of productive assets	9%	26%	63%
Sale/purchase of non-productive assets	13%	29%	57%
Poor			
Household income	22%	30%	47%
Spending of own earnings	34%	34%	31%
Sale/purchase of productive assets	8%	21%	69%
Sale/purchase of non-productive assets	12%	24%	63%
Very poor			
Household income	26%	24%	48%
Spending of own earnings	35%	29%	35%
Sale/purchase of productive assets	9%	22%	67%
Sale/purchase of non-productive assets	12%	24%	63%

Source: women's shura data

According to the men's shura interviewed, only 7% of the households in their communities received remittances from abroad, most of these falling in the better off, medium and poor wealth groups. In terms of food and cash debts, the women's shura interviewed reported that on average **49%** of the women-headed households in their communities had food debts, while only 21% had cash debts.

Education

Article Forty-three

Education, being the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, shall be offered up to the B.A. level in the state educational institutes free of charge by the state. To expand a balanced education as well as to provide mandatory intermediate education throughout Afghanistan, the state shall design and implement effective programmes and prepare the ground for teaching mother tongues in areas where they are spoken.

Article Forty-four

To create and foster balanced education for women, improve education of nomads as well as eliminate illiteracy in the country, the state shall devise and implement an effective plan.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter Two: Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

District-level respondents were divided about the main factors affecting the level of the educational services available to the population living in the area under survey – 9% felt the services available were sufficient, while 15% felt there were not enough schools for boys and girls. 14% specifically felt there were not enough **schools for girls,** 25% mentioned the **poor quality** of the teaching staff and 30% listed the fact that there were not enough **books** and **teaching materials** available.

Factors affecting the level of educational services available

Facilities were sufficient	Lack of schools for boys & girls	Lack of schools for girls	Poor quality of teaching staff	No books / teaching materials
9%	15%	14%	25%	30%

Source: *District data*

Adult literacy was reported by the men's shura as follows:

Adult literacy as reported by men's shura

	Total literate	Better Off	Medium	Poor	Very Poor
Men >14	50,902	28%	40%	25%	6%
Women > 14	7,814	32%	41%	21%	5%

Source: *Men's shura data*

Literacy among women was reported by the women's shura interviewed for the women living in their communities:

Literacy of adult women as reported by women's shura

	Total literate	Better Off	Medium	Poor	Very Poor
Women > 14	6,246	35%	38%	20%	8%

Source: *Women's shura data*

Net enrolment (NE) of children in the area under survey was reportedly **37%** for boys and **only 19%** for girls in the communities represented by the men's shura interviewed:

Net enrolment of boys and girls

	Boys			Girls		
	Community	In school	NE%	Community	In school	NE%
TOTAL	356,286	133,547	**37%**	330,916	63,867	**19%**
Better off	53,984	25,004	**46%**	50,005	12,571	**25%**
Medium	125,570	50,560	**40%**	115,786	24,277	**21%**
Poor	126,385	44,548	**35%**	116,100	21,159	**18%**
Very poor	51,990	14,372	**28%**	47,601	6,584	**14%**

Source: *Men's shura data*

With regard to the non-enrolment of children, on average, 25% of the men's wealth groups interviewed stated that all boys – in all wealth groups – in their communities were already enrolled in school. Those who were not enrolled were likely not enrolled primarily because of the **unavailability** of schools (as reported by another 20% of the respondent groups). The next most important factor mentioned was that of the **distance** of existing schools from children's homes. The children's own **employment** and **family** commitments followed, as did **cost** and finally **security** concerns. On average, only 15% of the men's wealth groups stated that all the girls in their communities were already enrolled in school – most of the respondent groups indicated that the unavailability of schools was the most important factor affecting girls' enrolment. This was followed by family commitments, distance, employment commitments and cost. Of note, security concerns – where mentioned for boys – were not mentioned for girls.

Changes in children's enrolment from the previous year are indicated below, as reported by the men's wealth groups interviewed:

Changes in children's enrolment by wealth group

	Increased	Same	Decreased	Not applicable
Better off/Medium				
Boys	67%	12%	1%	20%
Girls	39%	12%	1%	48%
Poor				
Boys	64%	13%	2%	20%
Girls	38%	12%	2%	48%
Very poor				
Boys	55%	20%	3%	22%
Girls	31%	16%	2%	51%

Source: *Male wealth group data*

Household level data on education show that 30% of the women-headed households interviewed had at least one literate household member, whereas the figure rose to 42% for the men-headed households. 12% of the respondents in the women-headed households and 14% of those in the men-headed households, listed the **lack of books and supplies** as one of the main problems faced by the schools in their areas. Both also mentioned the **poor condition** of the school facilities. While about 20% of the respondents in both households mentioned the **unavailability** of schools was a reason for the non-enrolment of children in school, 31% of the respondents in the women-headed households, and 41% of those in the men-headed households, stated that **family** commitments were also a reason for non-enrolment. **Employment** commitments were also mentioned by 13% and 16% respectively. 2% of the respondents in the women-headed households also mentioned the perception that children **do not learn useful things** in school as a reason for their non-enrolment.

Possible areas for intervention

The educational sector in Afghanistan is the scope of much study by many different development agencies working in the country. Issues that need to be addressed

range from infrastructural ones (availability) to socio-cultural and traditional ones (accessibility), not to mention the content of educational materials (curricula) and the quality of their delivery (teaching staff). While the foundations for a solid educational system must be addressed at policy level, there are some small initiatives that can take place at community level to assist in addressing some of the immediate, on-the-ground issues.

One of the main weaknesses of the educational sector identified by NRVA respondents at all levels related to the lack of books and teaching material in the schools.

Community paper providers. The most basic material required by learning children and schools is paper. It is suggested that women be activated to collect paper waste (and/or plant material if paper waste is not available in the community) and be trained in the home production of sheets of paper that can be used in schools and/or other households in the community. Women should be assisted in creating small home-based paper-selling income-generating activities. The process for making paper in the home from recycled paper is very simple, requires few implements (all of which can be found in the home, community or constructed)[86]. Women may either collect the waste paper to be used themselves or may purchase it from other women in the community involved in recycling activities (see above suggestions). In the future, external interest and investment could be sought for larger communities and/or urban and sub-urban areas[87].

Home printing. Once (if) paper supplies are sufficient, women can be trained in basic, home-based printing techniques. Ideally a group of women, of which at least one or two are literate, can be brought together to develop stencils and simple screen printing mechanisms. No electrical equipment is required, and all printing tools can be made using locally available wood and textiles[88]. Women involved in printing could also produce their own paper supplies (see above) or procure paper from other paper-producing women's groups. Relations should be established with community schools and/or the Provincial Department of Education to assist in the production of locally required school texts, in accordance with the official curriculum.

School furniture and materials. Following some of the previously described suggestions on constructing simple furniture and implements for the home (see above), it is suggested that women also be involved in producing furniture for schools (desks, chairs, stools, etc.). Again, relations should be established with the Provincial Departments of the Ministry of Education for marketing purposes.

Teacher training / community-based literacy teachers. There is a clear lack of qualified teachers, as well as a specific lack of qualified women teachers. Teacher-training initiatives that build women teachers are strongly needed. However, such initiatives should focus also on identifying and developing community-based teachers who will be able to stay in the rural community to continue teaching community members.

Accelerated learning initiatives. Numerous young women missed the opportunity to go to school and therefore have no primary or secondary school education. Most, if not all, are illiterate. Ministry of Education approved accelerated learning programmes need to be designed and delivered to young women to assist them in recuperating lost school years and reintegrating into the official school programmes (where available). Such programmes should adhere to the state approved primary and secondary school curricula, but should ensure the following academic topics are included, *inter alia*:

- Dari / Pashtu (as appropriate, where the local language is neither)
- Geography
- Government and the Constitution
- History
- Human rights
- Islamic studies
- Literacy and basic numeracy

Health

Article Fifty-two

The state shall provide free preventive healthcare and treatment of diseases as well as medical facilities to all citizens in accordance with the provisions of the law. Establishment and expansion of private medical services as well as health centres shall be encouraged and protected by the state in accordance with the provisions of the law. The state shall adopt necessary measures to foster physical education and national as well as local sports.

Article Fifty-four

Family is the fundamental pillar of the society, and shall be protected by the state. To attain the physical and spiritual health of the family, especially of the child and mother, upbringing of children, as well as the elimination of related traditions contrary to the principles of the sacred religion of Islam, the state shall adopt the necessary measures.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter One: State

11% of the district-level respondents felt that the health services available to the population living in the areas under survey were sufficient. However, 44% felt that the level of services was most affected by the fact that health facilities were **not available locally.** 22% indicated the **poor quality of the medical staff** was an important factor and 21% stated the facilities **lacked medicines.**

Factors affecting the level of health services available

Facilities were sufficient	Facilities not available locally	Poor quality of medical staff	Lack of medicines	Other
11%	44%	22%	21%	2%

Source: *District data*

The men's shura interviewed provided the following information on mortality, showing that it was highest among the poorer members of the community. Child

mortality was also very high (52%), and noticeably more frequent in the poorer households:

Adult and child mortality

	Total Funeral	%	B%	M%	P%	VP%
Funerals	20,495	.	14%	28%	35%	24%
Under five	10,612	52%	10%	25%	38%	29%

Source: *men's shura data*

Maternal mortality figures were provided by the women's shura for their communities – again mortality was highest among the poor:

Maternal mortality

Total deaths	B%	M%	P%	VP%
3,628	6%	19%	37%	37%

Source: *Women's shura data*

The most commonly available health services around the country were clearly **traditional birth attendants** (reported by 72% the men's shura interviewed). These were followed by **traditional healers** and **basic health centres**.

Availability of health services

Health post	Basic Health Centre	Comp. Health Centre	Hospital	Trad. Healer	Trad. Birth Attend.	Private Doctor
3%	18%	2%	4%	44%	72%	15%

Source: *Men's shura data*

In terms of accessibility, the men's shura interviewed stated that some health services could be found within the communities themselves, while others could be accessed by vehicle as shown below:

Accessibility of health services

	In the community	< ¼ day	¼ to ½ day	½ to 1 day	> 1 day	Not access.
Health Post	4%	37%	20%	14%	8%	18%
CHC	1%	37%	27%	15%	10%	6%
BHC	14%	56%	16%	5%	3%	4%
Hospital	2%	38%	27%	12%	9%	4%
Trad. healer	42%	22%	6%	3%	1%	13%
TBA	70%	11%	2%	1%	0%	8%
Doctor	12%	47%	19%	6%	4%	3%

Source: *Men's shura data*

In terms of household preferences for services, the **private doctor** was identified by most of the men's wealth groups as the preferred health service for households in the better off/medium wealth group, while those in the poor and very poor wealth groups were more likely to prefer the **basic health centre**. The better off/medium and poor households were next likely to choose a **traditional healer**, whereas those in the very poor wealth group were more likely to choose the **hospital**.

Preferences for health services

	Health post	BHC	CHC	Hospital	Trad. Healer	Private doctor
Better off/Medium	11%	64%	22%	50%	58%	71%
Poor	10%	65%	15%	53%	52%	55%
Very poor	10%	62%	13%	54%	47%	42%

Source: Male wealth group data

According to the women's shura interviewed, women-headed households in their communities were most likely to choose the **basic health centre** or the **traditional healer**, followed by the private doctor and/or the hospital.

Preferences for health services of women-headed households

Health post	BHC	CHC	Hospital	Traditional Healer	Private doctor
7%	48%	9%	30%	47%	31%

Source: Women's shura data

In terms of maternal health and family planning, around half the women's wealth groups interviewed felt women across wealth groups **used traditional birth attendants** (TBA) during birth. However, just over 60% felt women could have a say in the number of children they had. While almost 80% felt women could participate in the decision-making about spouses for their sons, just under 70% felt women could participate in the selection of husbands for their daughters.

Women's role in family planning

Wealth group	Yes	Sometimes	No
Better off/Medium			
Use TBA during birth	56%	22%	20%
Can decide on the number of children	15%	25%	59%
Can decide who sons marry	51%	23%	24%
Can decide who daughters marry	44%	24%	31%
Poor	%	%	%
Use TBA during birth	49%	27%	22%
Can decide on the number of children	13%	23%	62%
Can decide who sons marry	48%	23%	27%
Can decide who daughters marry	40%	25%	33%
Very poor	%	%	%
Use TBA during birth	46%	25%	27%
Can decide on the number of children	9%	24%	65%
Can decide who sons marry	47%	24%	27%
Can decide who daughters marry	40%	24%	34%

Source: Female wealth group data

General sanitary conditions in the households interviewed revealed that **38%** of the women-headed households interviewed had **no latrine** at all, while **61%** had a traditional one and 1% had some other form of a latrine – 94% of the women-headed households felt their toilet facilities were **inadequate**. **29%** of the men-headed households had no latrine, while **70%** had a traditional one – here too, 90% declared their facilities were inadequate.

In terms of cooking fuel, **37%** of the women-headed households interviewed reported using **animal dung** as their main cooking fuel, while **45%** listed **ping or bushes. 13%** reported using **firewood,** while 3% used crop residues or sawdust. The men-headed households also reported using animal dung, ping or bushes, firewood and crop residues or sawdust (26%, 42%, 28% and 2% respectively).

Questions revolving around health and illnesses revealed that 1% of the men-headed households reported having a physically and/or mentally disabled household member, while 1% of the women-headed households reported having a physically disabled household member only. **20%** of the women-headed households reported that a household member had been **seriously ill** during the four

weeks prior to the survey, as did **24%** of the men-headed households. In both households, the majority of the cases for which a cause of illness was reported were related to **fever/malaria,** followed by **diarrhoea**. Most households also reported that health providers were not used – the most common reason being that they were too **expensive** followed by the perception that the illnesses were **not serious**. When health providers were used, both households seem to have preferred consulting a basic health centre, followed by a private doctor.

Possible areas for intervention

Women are already largely targeted through various health education initiatives. However, true health education takes time, and training initiatives should be structured to include refresher courses that target the same women who have undergone the initial trainings. One of the biggest weaknesses of development training initiatives in various sectors is participant drop-out rate and lack of follow-up. Health education initiatives need to be less invasive and of longer duration. Given the frequent scarcity of health providers to which women can go freely, heath education initiatives should consider embedding consultation time into the programme so women can seek advice on specific health situations they might experience in the home.

The following are some of the areas where skills and capacity-building can be delivered, as well as income-generating opportunities developed. There are clearly a multitude of possible intervention points – these are only some of those that can be suggested upon consideration of the NRVA data collected.

Mobile Community health worker units. Clearly the lack of health facilities is a problem issue for all communities surveyed. While government policies and strategies have been finalised identifying infrastructural requirements[89] and action plans[90], implementation on the ground will still be a long time coming. It is suggested that in the context of the state plans, utilising Ministry of Health (MoH) approved curricula, women be targeted for *Community Health Worker* training programmes, and that mobile units (able to visit individual households in a community) be established to facilitate women in their access to health services.

Awareness-raising in caring practices. Little can be said from the NRVA data in the area of maternal and child mortality *rates* as the number of women of child-bearing age and the number of children under five in the community are not captured[91]. What is clear from the data however is that maternal deaths increase as socio-economic position worsens (this is also consistent with the data provided on the use of TBAs –i.e., women in the very poor wealth group are somewhat less likely to use a TBA during birth). As they are also less likely to have a say in the number of children they have it is presumed that they have more children and ultimately suffer the physical consequences of frequent and multiple pregnancies. Research has shown that specific training in child care, feeding and use of preventive health services could have a large impact on the growth of children living in impoverished environments.

***Care** is the provision in the household and the community of time, attention and support to meet the physical, mental and social needs of the growing child and other household members[92]. **Caring practices** therefore may include, inter alia: feeding behaviours (breastfeeding and complementary feeding), hygiene behaviours (related to food, individuals and the home), psychosocial behaviours (such as responsiveness, warmth, involvement and opportunities for learning) and health behaviours (service utilisation, oral re-hydration therapy and home care)[93].*

Training activities in pre- and post-natal care, child caring practices and nutrition would be in order – ideally food-for-training activities with micro-nutrient fortified foods, given that women have higher energy, protein and micronutrient requirements when they are pregnant and/or nursing[94]. Such training should also target adolescent girls as prospective mothers given that those who enter pregnancy malnourished or who do not gain sufficient weight during pregnancy are more likely to deliver low-birth-weight babies, who face a heightened risk of dying during the first week of life. The consequences of early malnutrition are an increased risk of illness and damage to physical and mental capabilities that may persist into adulthood. The effects of malnutrition during childhood and adolescence are particularly devastating for girls. Girls who are malnourished during childhood are more likely to be malnourished as adolescents, to enter their first pregnancy malnourished, and to give birth to underweight babies, thus perpetuating the cycle of malnutrition across generations. This effect is aggravated if the first pregnancy takes place during adolescence[95].

Nutrition awareness, rehabilitation and cooking classes. Women in Afghanistan are the main food preparers for the household, regardless of socio-economic position. It is suggested that community women be brought together to participate in nutrition and cooking classes that focus on (a) understanding the basics about child and adult nutritional requirements and the importance of dietary diversity and balanced meals (most meals are predominantly complex carbohydrate based – i.e., rise, *naan* and sugars, with disproportionately low protein accompaniment notwithstanding the availability of protein sources[96,97]), (b) adequate food preparation that minimises health risks and maximises nutritional value of the foods consumed, (c) introducing foods not traditionally consumed (e.g., fowl, goose, duck, fish, etc.) but prepared using traditional spices and adequate cooking methods for increased dietary diversity and flexibility.

Community dental helpers. Dental health is a fundamental part of child and adult physical development – it is also one of the most neglected health services in

many developing countries. While true dentists need to be trained and integrated into the country-wide health service sector, there are a number of skills and practices that can be introduced at the household level to reduce the likelihood of dental disease. It is suggested that women be trained in basic dental care for children and adults, and that basic natural remedies be shared for cleaning and disinfecting the mouth, and the treatment of some of the more common ailments, such as irritated gums, teething and or tooth loss[98].

Intestinal and other parasites, sanitation and hygiene. Women should be targeted for comprehensive training in preventing, recognising and treating the various parasitic infections that afflict man[99]. Basic sanitation and hygiene as it applies to food preparation, child handling and human waste management must be covered, as well as basic deworming techniques using natural ingredients and foods locally available –i.e., raw garlic, pumpkin seeds, pomegranates, beets, and carrots[100]. Of prime importance is also understanding how the various types are transmitted and what measures can be taken to reduce or eliminate their carriers in the household and surrounding environment[101]

Water purification techniques. In view of the above, and general health and sanitation requirements in general, it is strongly suggested that women be trained in basic techniques for water purification –i.e., sand filtration[102], solar distillation[103] and disinfection[104], etc. These methods should be applied to the drinking water used in the home, but could also be used on a larger scale if women were to establish a community water distribution service (see above suggestion under the suggestion on Labour and Income-generating).

Organic and non-organic waste management. More information on community waste management awareness and practices needs to be collected, to understand what people believe and know about their environment and the impact of untreated waste on it and on man, what men and women believe to be their responsibilities and what current practices are being carried out. Areas to explore include, among others: organic waste management and recycling, human waste management, natural resource consumption and replenishment, community sanitation and hygiene, etc.

Particular attention and recognition should be given to the role and the special situation of women living in rural areas and those working in the agricultural sector, where access to training, land, natural and productive resources, credit, development programmes and cooperative structures can help them increase their participation in sustainable development. Environmental risks in the home and workplace may have a disproportionate impact on women's health because of women's different susceptibilities to the toxic effects of various chemicals.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995, Section *K: Women and the environment*, pgs. 96-102.

It is suggested that women be targeted for technical trainings in household and community waste management needs, techniques and procedures. Areas that need to be covered include human waste disposal[105,106], household organic waste disposal and non-organic waste disposal. One of the most promising and feasible techniques is that of composting[107,108], which should be explored in detail for both household and community level waste recycling.

Waste management committees. Once sufficient knowledge is acquired, women (and men) should be encouraged to form community waste management committees[109] to coordinate the collection of non-organic waste in the community, to ensure community households are familiarised with appropriate waste management techniques, and to supervise the construction, where possible, of improved and/or ventilated pit latrines[110]. The construction of pit latrines should be a major community priority as the NRVA data reveals that almost 40% of the households in the communities surveyed did not have any form of latrine at all.

Soap-making. In view of all of the above, women should also be targeted for technical training in soap making - using household by-products which are readily available in the community at no cost. The two main ingredients for making soap are (a) a fatty substance, either animal fat such as tallow or lard, or vegetable oils and (b) lye, which can be obtained lye obtained by leaching or washing water through the ashes of plants[111]. Women can produce soap in the home for their own household use and can sell excesses to their own and surrounding communities.

Malaria prevention and treatment. Looking at the NRVA data, most cases of illness reported by both men and women-headed households had to do with fever/malarial illnesses. Malaria is a major contributor to severe anaemia both in children as well as in pregnant and lactating women. In areas of intense malaria transmission, a leading cause of severe disease and death in young children is severe iron deficiency anaemia[112]. Mild anaemia (of which *falciparum* malaria is one of the many causes) is also very common in Afghanistan – survey data from 2002 found that 12% of the population and nearly 30% of children under five years of age had haemoglobin less than 11 g/dl[113]. Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to malaria as pregnancy reduces a woman's immunity to malaria, making her more susceptible to malaria infection and increasing the risk of illness, severe anaemia and death. For the unborn child, maternal malaria increases the risk of spontaneous abortion, stillbirth, premature delivery and low birth weight - a leading cause of child mortality. In view of the above, it is strongly recommended that women be actively targeted with information on how to prevent and/or manage malaria during pregnancy[114], and be provided with insecticide-treated nets. Sleeping under ITNs remains an important strategy for protecting pregnant women and their newborns from malaria-carrying mosquitoes[115] as does

having the ability to detect the disease and to follow recommended treatment options.

Family planning and reproductive health. Family planning and reproductive health are now recognised by the development community as fundamental areas for intervention. However, experience has shown that traditional, economic and religious factors affect the social acceptance of the concept of family planning. The concept of birth spacing – the flip side of the coin – presented as a way ***to** have children* but safely and healthily may be more effective in attaining the final objective – which remains that of lowering the number of children per woman. Initiatives addressing the use of contraceptive methods and the distribution of condoms, oral and injectable contraception for women should also be explored. In all cases, it is fundamental that men be involved in whatever training activities are proposed on the concept of family planning.

Awareness-raising in HIV/AIDs and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Alongside basic reproductive health and sex education initiatives, it is fundamental that women receive information on HIV/AIDs and other STDs. It is suggested that such awareness-raising / training initiatives be aligned to run parallel to other types of (unrelated) training or work activities, as participation in training initiatives sold to communities as HIV/AIDs-STD awareness-raising activities is likely to be much affected by the taboo that the topic still carries in Afghan communities[116].

Natural medicine and first aid skills. In order to reduce the tragic consequences of neglected minor injuries (e.g., infection, severe fever, gangrene etc.) women should be trained in basic first aid response techniques and taught the medicinal properties of plants and trees available in their areas. The lack of medicines (where health facilities exist) was reported as a major problem in almost all areas surveyed by the NRVA. Learning to treat bites, cuts, scrape, contortions and other minor but potentially problematic health concerns[117], with naturally available ingredients[118] and knowing what behaviours to adopt (e.g., flushing with cold water, cleaning with boiled water, applying pressure and bandages or leaving open-air, etc.) can help women assist injured household members better, reduce and improve convalescence, and ultimately also reduce potentially costly medical expenses. Such skills are widely appreciated in communities, and women could also become the local "community health consultant". Services could also be fee-based if the women are able to mobilise the community to recognise their skills.

Violence against women. Violence against women is not only an issue of social security relevance – it is a public health emergency and is one of the major causes of death and disability for women 16 to 44 years of age[119], and one in three women will suffer some form of violence in her lifetime, becoming part of an epidemic that devastates lives, fractures communities and stalls development[120].

"There must be no impunity for gender-based violence. Let me be clear. What we are talking about is not a side issue. It is not a special interest group of concern to only a few. What we are talking about are not only women's rights but also the human rights of over one half of this globe's population. Violence against women concerns not only women, but above all the rest of us". -- Sergio Vieira de Mello, April 2003[121]

As a massive, underestimated social illness, it needs to be addressed at all levels of social life – in state policy and targeted legislation, in the health service and educational sectors and in the household, through gradual change in beliefs, attitudes and practices relating to women's roles in the home, the couple, society and their relationship with men in general (it should however be noted that many perpetrators of violence against women are other women). The following is a summary of the recommendations presented in the UNIFEM document *Not a minute more: Ending Violence Against Women* (2003) on how to begin addressing this enormous issue, with some suggestions as to how they might be initiated at the community level:

- **Data collection and research:** the area of violence against women is a very delicate one and data collection cannot be carried out like any other quantitative survey. It is suggested that women community health workers (see above suggestions) be trained in identifying violence-related injuries and trauma and in their correct case recording. A formal mechanism for the escalation and collection of such information needs to be integrated into the Ministry of Health plan for provincial coverage and provision of services;
- **Training and public awareness:** Clearly training is recommended for those involved in the administration of justice, but at the same time, training at the community-level is required across the board in the following areas, among others:
  - basic human rights;
  - what behaviours are legally and socially defined as violence;
  - what legal and punitive mechanisms are in place to deal with perpetrators of violence;
  - what are the individual and social consequences of violence.
- **Women's economic and political empowerment:** while it is true that economic dependency prohibits women from leaving abusive situations, it must also be recognised that their newfound economic independence can also precipitate violence. Men and women must be involved in awareness-raising activities focussing on the benefits ***to the entire household (husband included)*** of women's economic empowerment. Methods and mechanisms for household income management need to be taught and men must be put in a position to be able to see

their wives' earning power as a positive factor rather than a menacing one. This issue is ***largely overlooked*** by over zealous programmes aiming to provide women with economic independence. Afghan society is complex, traditions and beliefs are deeply rooted not only in men but also in women – they must be considered when introducing such a social change factor as economic independence. Educational and BDS initiatives in this area must be designed to take these factors into consideration;

- **Men's participation:** men are not the only perpetrators of violence against women, however, they are the perpetrators about which most is known. Having said that, community-level men's organisations need to be established to support non-violence against women and to educate men on this issue (men-to-men training);
- **Leadership:** community leaders (religious and political) need to be involved in sensitisation sessions to heighten their awareness of the importance of their supporting men's and women's community-based initiatives to fight violence against women.

Training in psycho-social wellness techniques. While all of the above mechanisms begin to take form, women continue to experience violence and traumatic situations. It is suggested that special initiatives focussing on imparting psycho-social wellness skills be carried out at community level to help men and women understand and deal with trauma better[122].

There are many areas for intervention in this field – the above are only some suggestions for immediate community level action. Greater initiatives are currently underway at state level to address the issue of violence against women in a more lasting and documented manner.

Coping strategies

District-level respondents were divided when rating their areas in terms of vulnerability:

Women's role in family planning

Best – least vulnerable	Second best	Middle	Second worst	**Worst** – most vulnerable
26%	25%	22%	19%	7%

Source: District data

A comparison of household assets between men and **women-headed households** shows that the latter were somewhat less likely to own their dwellings, and were more likely to live in dwellings without paying rent. Women-headed households were also less likely to have **electricity**. They also reported having more difficulties meeting household food requirements during the previous year than did the men-headed households, hence their somewhat more negative assessment of the general economic situation of their households.

Household assets of men and women-headed households

Household assets	WHH	MHH
Ownership of dwellings		
Dwelling is fully owned	62%	80%
Dwelling is rented	5%	3%
Using dwelling w/o paying rent	25%	11%
Nomadic or temporary	6%	5%
Other	0%	0%
Household access to electricity		
No Electricity	90%	85%
Has access to a personal generator	2%	6%
Has access to a village generator	4%	5%
Has access to public supply	3%	2%
Frequency of problems in satisfying household food needs		
Never	3%	10%
seldom	5%	16%
Sometimes	18%	32%
often	28%	22%
Always	44%	19%
Ranking of economic situation compared to previous year		
Much worse	23%	12%
Slightly worse	16%	17%
The same	37%	38%
Slightly better	23%	31%
Much better	1%	2%

Source: Household data

In terms of participation in community decision-making, 95% of the women's wealth groups interviewed felt that women across wealth groups **did not participate** in community decisions about village leaders, village disputes and disputes arising outside the village. Women's role in community decision-making is notoriously weak in Afghanistan, and the NRVA data clearly confirm this. It would also appear that this is one area where their socio-economic status/wealth group factor carries little if any weight.

Women's participation in the community

Wealth group	Yes	Sometimes	No
Better off/Medium			
Decisions about village leaders	1%	2%	95%
Solving disputes in the village	1%	2%	95%
Solving disputes outside the village	0%	1%	97%
Poor			
Decisions about village leaders	1%	1%	96%
Solving disputes in the village	1%	1%	96%
Solving disputes outside the village	0%	1%	98%
Very poor			
Decisions about village leaders	1%	2%	97%
Solving disputes in the village	1%	2%	97%
Solving disputes outside the village	0%	1%	98%

Source: Female wealth group data

Coping strategies for the various wealth groups were reported by the men's wealth groups, and the women's wealth groups for the women-headed households in their communities as follows:

Men and women-headed household coping strategies

Strategy	Men's wealth groups			Women's wealth groups		
	BO/M	P	VP	BO/M	P	VP
No coping mechanisms used	45%	4%	2%	25%	4%	3%
Reduced quality/quantity of diet	21%	52%	55%	32%	48%	46%
Decreased expenditures	9%	14%	15%	11%	15%	16%
Increased collection and sale of natural resources	1%	3%	2%	1%	3%	2%
Spent savings or investments	9%	2%	1%	12%	3%	1%
Took loans from family/friends	2%	6%	5%	2%	7%	7%
Took loans from employer/ moneylender/ NGOs	-	-	-	-	-	-
Purchased food on credit traders	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Received help from community	-	2%	3%	-	2%	4%
Sold appliances, furniture, doors...	-	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Sold income generating equipment	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	-
Rented out land	1%	-	-	-	-	-
Mortgaged house or land	-	1%	-	1%	1%	-
Sold female reproductive livestock	3%	4%	2%	3%	3%	2%
Sold house or land	-	1%	-	-	-	-
Worked for food only	1%	3%	3%	1%	3%	4%
Worked on relief programmes	2%	2%	1%	1%	-	-
Out migrated to look for work	2%	1%	-	1%	-	1%
Joined military	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased child labour	-	1%	2%	1%	3%	3%
Sons work as indentured labour	-	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Sold child brides <13 yrs	-	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%
Begging	-	-	2%	-	-	2%
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: *Men's and women's wealth group data*

Possible areas for intervention

Article Forty-nine

Forced labour shall be forbidden... Forced labour on children shall not be allowed.

Article Fifty-four

Family is the fundamental pillar of the society, and shall be protected by the state. To attain the physical and spiritual health of the family, especially of the child and mother, upbringing of children, as well as the elimination of related traditions contrary to the principles of the sacred religion of Islam, the state shall adopt necessary measures.

The Constitution of Afghanistan
Chapter Two: Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

Discussing coping mechanisms. While household survival is clearly the concern of all heads-of-households, some of the coping mechanisms adopted, such as increasing child labour and/or sending sons to work as indentured labour and/or selling daughters as child brides, should be targeted by the development community through appropriate knowledge dissemination mechanisms. However, it should be stated that rights-awareness campaigns are often *not* the most circumstantially appropriate or realistic interventions, nor are they sufficient in combating certain practices. Spreading information about the practical side and negative consequences of such practices alongside other activities may be a slower but more durable means of affecting people's perceptions on these issues.

What is Forced Labour?

All work or service that is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily[123].

Underlying this definition there are seven major categories of forced labour, detailed below[124]*:*

- *Slavery and Abductions*
- *Compulsory Participation in Public Works Projects*
- *Mandatory Forced Labour in Remote Areas*
- *Bonded labour*
- *Involuntary Labour Resulting from Trafficking in Persons*
- *Domestic Workers in Involuntary Labour Situations*
- *Prison Labour and Rehabilitation Through Work*
- *Other Forms of Forced Labour*

Forced (or indentured) labour affects men, women and children in many different ways – though often not recognised as such – as many of the conditions that characterise forced labour are common to the daily lives of the rural poor – particularly women –i.e., they can be sold into the ownership of another; they can experience (or be threatened with) physical violence against themselves, other family members or their relatives; they experience imprisonment in the home or other physical confinement; they are excluded from community and social life; their rights or privileges are removed; they are often deprived of food, shelter or other necessities; and they lose social status. The following echo some of the mechanisms for fighting forced labour outlined by the International Labour Organisation, and offer suggestions on how community-level activities could be tackled to address the issues at hand[125]:

- **Research, studies and surveys.** Detailed information on women's work patterns is needed. In particular, women need to be asked questions about how they spend their time, where they spend their time and what "rules" they feel they have to observe. Qualitative surveys / case studies in this area are highly advised as the information that needs to be captured must also relate to how much – and what – women *perceive* they can alter of their working life. NRVA data on women's freedom to spend their own earnings indicates another area that needs to be further explored (e.g., it would be helpful to understand the dynamics of women's financial dependence: do their husbands also earn? Do they hand over all of their money? Do they/ can they keep any for themselves? How are their wages? How are they paid? etc.).
- **Awareness raising and advocacy.** Men and women alike need to be informed of what practices are within the legal framework of employment and which ones fall outside the boundaries of legally regulated work practices. This is particularly important for IDP and returnee people as they may be particularly vulnerable to exploitative employers and/or working conditions. Innovative methods, including street theatre, have been used in rural areas in other countries to portray the gravity of the conditions and consequences of forced labour.

Micro-financing and vocational training. Targeted vocational training coupled with guided micro-financing, while clearly the general recipe for women's economic

empowerment and improved living conditions, will also ultimately fight the conditions that push vulnerable households to adopt unhealthy coping practices and to enter into exploitative work commitments.

Box 3.4.[126]
Microfinance and bonded labour

Microfinance can be important both for reducing the dependence of workers on wage advances from their employers, and for effective rehabilitation of released bonded labourers. PEBLISA[127] is collaborating with local microfinance institutions (MFIs) to test a range of financial services specially tailored to the needs of households at heightened risk of falling into debt bondage. Such families need financial services to smooth income and expenses, to manage risks, and possibly to pay for social obligations – in essence, removing the need for employer credit.

Experience indicates the need for four core financial services, with the emphasis on savings mobilization rather than credit, at least in the first instance:

(1) *"Contractual" savings:* The project emphasizes savings and asset building to create a buffer for the household to fall back on in times of emergency. Clients "contract" to save a fixed amount of money, however small, on a regular basis. They are meanwhile assisted with household financial planning, so as to produce a lump sum of money for a specific purpose, such as house construction, school fees or religious ceremonies.

(2) *Liquid savings:* Families vulnerable to bondage need a safe place to store small amounts of surplus cash, where it is accessible in times of need, but not so accessible that the temptation to spend is hard to resist. In some cases, savings are deposited weekly or fortnightly during group meetings. But in others, where pressures to spend are the highest, clients are provided with lockboxes that are kept at home so they can save on a daily basis; accumulated savings are then deposited at the group meeting.

(3) *Income-generating loans:* Innovative approaches to credit for income-generating activities aim carefully to avoid putting clients in a potentially worse situation through increasing their debt. The project is experimenting with very small loans; penalty-free repayment holidays; tailoring repayment schedules to the household's expected cash flow; and allowing each borrower in a group to have individual customized loan amounts and terms, or no loan at all if they so wish.

(4) *Emergency loans:* These are sometimes given in parallel with an income-generating loan. The project strives to cultivate an approach to repayment discipline in which the carrot greatly outweighs the stick, with plenty of second chances given, as long as the problem clearly stems from an inability rather than an unwillingness to repay.

Alongside the core financial services, the project also provides necessary supporting services such as household financial planning to identify sources of high expenditures (dowries, religious ceremonies, alcohol) and financial education; awareness raising on the legality of employer and moneylender loans; community mobilization to cut down on unsustainable expenditures; and skills training to start or expand income-generating activities. Other services being tested include micro-insurance, debt consolidation loans and land leasing.

The complex issue of early marriage and child brides. In Afghanistan, 54% of girls are married by the age of 18[128]. The condition of early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts – it cuts off educational opportunities and chances of personal growth for both boys and girls (that boys are also forced into early marriage should not go ignored). However, for girls, early marriage almost always leads to premature pregnancy and childbearing, and is likely to lead to a lifetime of *"domestic and sexual subservience over which they have no control"*[129].

"Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses."
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16 (21)

Changing the practice of selling child brides in Afghanistan requires understanding the context and causes for it perpetration. The practices is often an economic coping mechanism or it can be seen as a way of protecting girls from premarital sex and pregnancies, a way of "protecting her virginity" – whatever the reasons, they are many and very complex. Fact remains that the consequences are clear: adolescent "wives" are subject to psycho-social distress, forced sexual relations, increased exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancies, child-bearing difficulties (sometimes death), interrupted or reduced chances for education, violence and abandonment.

While many courses of action need to be taken at the policy level (ideally to address the larger factors that affect the household conditions that push parents to accept or propose early marriage for their children), there are also community-level initiatives that can begin to work on current beliefs and attitudes towards these practices. Some are suggested here below:

Adult and adolescent sex education. Information on "sex education" *per se* cannot easily and overtly be disseminated in Afghanistan because of cultural sensitivities. However, adults and children alike need to be taught the truths about biology and human reproduction. The condition of virginity needs to be demystified. As mentioned above, information on sexually transmitted diseases and their true consequences from a health and psychological perspective need to be well understood. Women in particular need to be targeted to receive this information, as well as information on contraception and available contraceptive methods, as they need to learn that they can and should negotiate their own sexual relations. Men need to be targeted for awareness-raising in women's authority and rights in this area. Clearly these are not easy changes to bring about, but the gradual introduction of these topics into other activities (as suggested earlier in relation to HIV/AIDs and STD issues) would be advisable and a low-impact way of introducing the topics to community members.

Contraception. Community-based initiatives for the distribution of condoms and other feasible forms of contraception are urgently needed. While they may target women for distribution, they must target men for implementation and adherence.

Community-level awareness raising. General information dissemination on the negative and practical aspects of early marriage needs to be carried out at the community-level as a preventive measure. As previously

mentioned, such information dissemination need not necessarily be *post facto* but should be disseminated to all community members throughout the course of regular activities (e.g., trainings, seminars, workshops, etc.).

Micro-financing. When adopted as an economic coping mechanism, early marriages remain a source of rapid income – a last resort financial transaction – for destitute families. The economic aspect of the practice must be recognised, and the reality that it can be fought only once the economic duress that it aims to relieve is relieved through other means must be accepted. Increased micro-financing opportunities for households may reduce the likelihood of some households opting to sell their daughters if economic duress is their main reason for contemplating the practice. However, it must be pointed out that, as with all financial transactions, where there is supply there is demand, and while the selling families need to be targeted to help them find alternative solutions, those who "buy" child brides must also be targeted. Much more information needs to be collected about the other parties to this practice so that the needs that are satisfied by the acquisition of a child bride can be better understood.

Development priorities

When asked what areas the Afghan government should focus on for development, district-level respondents listed the following needs: improving **health** and **educational** facilities in the area (20% and 19% respectively), rehabilitating the **irrigation** systems (16%), constructing or repairing **rural roads** (14%), improving the quantity and quality of **drinking water** (12%), improving the **veterinary** services and **micro-credit schemes** available (5%), increasing **employment** opportunities (3%), providing **vocational** training (2%), and improving **housing** and providing **literacy** training (1% each). The following table presents the areas identified by the men's and women's wealth group respondents on men's and women's priorities for community development:

Men's and women's development priorities

Area for improvement	Men's wealth group	Women's wealth group
Improved drinking water quality/quantity	27%	32%
Rehabilitation of irrigation system	27%	13%
Construction or repairing of rural roads	7%	9%
Construction of new roads to improve rural access	4%	4%
Improvement to health facilities in the area	13%	19%
Improvement to education facilities in the area	6%	5%
Improvement to community housing	1%	2%
Improved veterinary services	1%	1%
Micro-credit schemes	6%	6%
Employment opportunities	5%	4%
Literacy training	-	2%
Vocational skills training	1%	2%
Other	1%	-

Source : *Men's and women's wealth group data*

In terms of relief assistance in the area under survey, 34% of the district-level respondents indicated cash-for-work was the most appropriate option, while 44% indicated a **combination** of cash and food-for-work would be better. 22% mentioned food-for-work alone. However the men's and women's wealth group interviews revealed the following mix of preferences depending on the season.

Men's and women's relief intervention preferences

	Winter		Spring		Summer		Fall	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
CFW	18%	17%	36%	27%	59%	51%	41%	39%
FFW	69%	62%	47%	49%	16%	21%	30%	30%
Both	12%	19%	16%	20%	22%	23%	27%	27%

Source : *Men's and women's wealth group data*

CONCLUSIONS

The NRVA has yielded a tremendous amount of data. It was a very comprehensive survey that aimed to gather information about a wide range of issues affecting people's lives. For the purposes of a true "academic" gender analysis, additional information on the roles and relations of rural men and women is needed. Still, the data available today thanks to the NRVA is amply sufficient to provide a general picture of the many areas where men and women need assistance – and they are many.

Bottom-up, community-level educational interventions, can begin to lay the foundations for gradual change in the knowledge levels, attitudes and practices of all community members. At the same time, targeted vocational initiatives that provides women with concrete skills that enable them to better fend for themselves in their own communities can help lay the foundations for women's empowerment in economic, social and cultural terms. However educational and vocational initiatives must address the existing constructs of men and women, as changes in women's lives must be balanced by changes in men's lives, to maintain community and household equilibrium.

In addition, the development community must recognise and accept that the quality level of the content and tools delivered to rural men and women through community-level initiatives must be controlled and of acceptable standards. Quality remains of fundamental importance as opposed to quantity. True long-term impact at the community level should be the ultimate objective of all interventions and a committed and sustained move on behalf of funding agencies to ensure quality delivery (and contracting of truly qualified and experienced implementing partners) needs to be undertaken.

Micro-financing and micro-credit – delivered in a controlled and targeted manner – can offer vulnerable households short-term respite and increased opportunities to focus resources on developing more sustainable livelihoods. There is a need for financial assistance (at times even on a very small scale) in almost all of the areas identified in this report – i.e., improving natural resource management, developing agricultural practices and alternative livelihoods, improving availability of educational and health resources, fighting socially and individually destructive coping mechanisms, etc.

Developing wide-spread lending, savings and banking opportunities for men and women alike is an area that warrants as much attention and concrete investment as possible. As education and personal experiences of improved living conditions increase, as acquired through truly successful and sustainable community-level intervention activities, the people of Afghanistan will gradually construct and seek to further their own empowerment, as is the natural growth process of all people's emerging from decades of darkness and stunted social development.

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[7] Questionnaire forms collected data for individual household members on different sheets of paper, however no system was in place to ensure enumerators maintained coherent and continuous records for each individual across different sheets e.g., household member X whose answers were placed on line 1 of page one may not necessarily have been placed consistently on line 1 of page 2, thus introducing an error in the complete record relating to individual X at the moment of data entry. This risk is particularly relevant when attempting to pull out data at the individual household member level and to conduct even a simple tally of numbers by select criteria (e.g., age, sex, etc.).

[8] NRVA Questionnaire guidelines for the Men's Shura questionnaire define this criteria as follows: "...households that don't have anyone that can work, be it through disabilities, because the household is made of women and they can't leave the home to work, that the head of the household is permanently sick and his children are to young to work, and so on..."

[9] NRVA Questionnaire guidelines for the Men's Shura questionnaire define this criteria as follows: "households run by women – such as widows – and whose sons are too young to take over the responsibility of running the household. Typically in Afghanistan, this is regarded as boys under 14 years old. If there are women that fall into this category, yet they are living in the home of another relative that is supporting and looking after them, then do NOT include them as female-headed households."

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